NF

ISSUE #61: THE RULE OF THREE

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33 YEARS LATER: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

RIVER CITY SAGA: THREE KINGDOMS

AZURE STRIKER GUNVOLT 3

FIRE EMBLEM WARRIORS: THREE HOPES

DRAGON QUE
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SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER 2022

OUT WITH THE OLD . . .

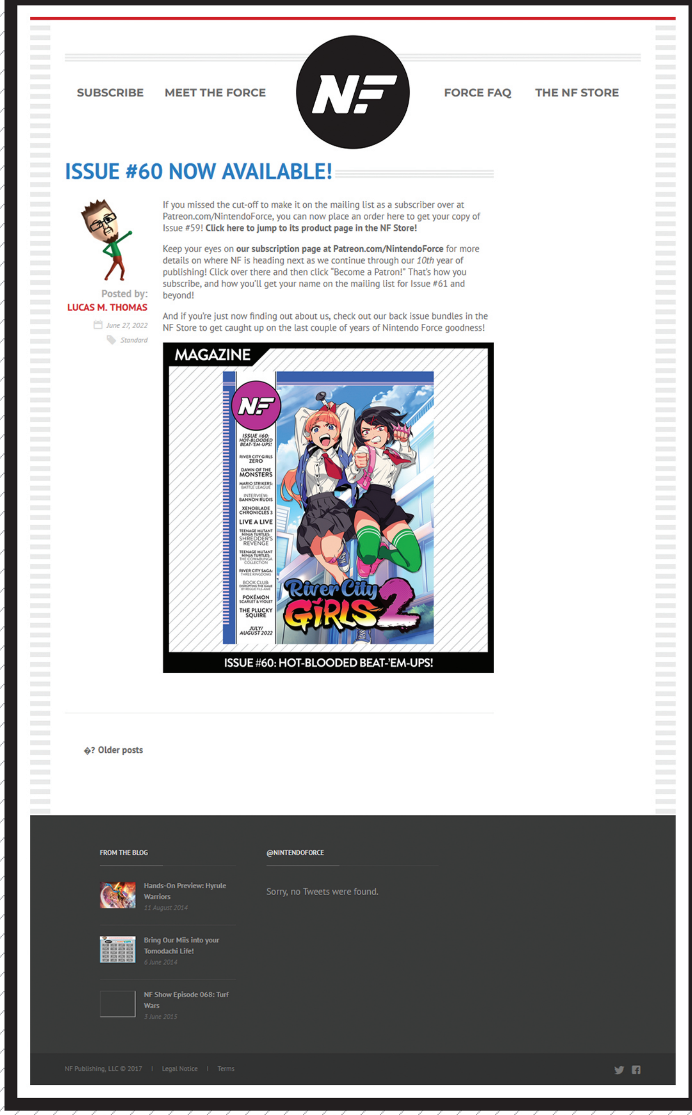
IF YOU'VE FOUND yourself browsing our website at any point in the last few years, you've probably thought it was looking a little long in the tooth. It's OK to admit! You won't hurt our feelings! We've been thinking the same thing.

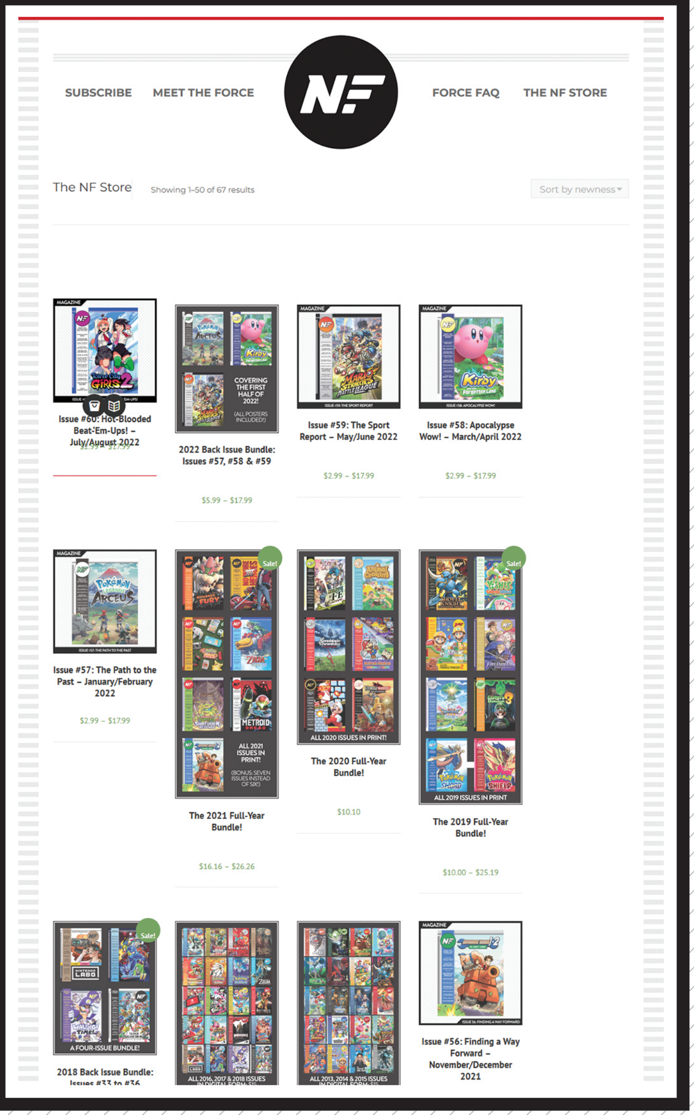
This inner-cover page last declared the arrival of a website redesign *waaaay* back in NF #7 . . . over eight and a half years ago! Yes, we've been rocking with the same look and functionality there for going on a decade at this point. That's positively ancient in the world of web design, and at long last we're finally moving forward with a revamp!

There should be no downtime while we phase out the old site and introduce the new one. And the old one, while a little wonky-looking at this point, is still perfectly usable. And it will remain so through the next few weeks/months as work on the redesign takes place behind the scenes, so feel free to still visit it and shop the back issue selection! You all wanted to have some time to say your goodbyes to the old look anyway, right?

With luck, I'll be able to introduce you all to the totally overhauled new site in this same page space soon. Maybe in time for our next issue! Thanks for putting up with the old for so long, and please look forward to the new! **— LUCAS**

NFMagazine.com or **NintendoForceMagazine.com**





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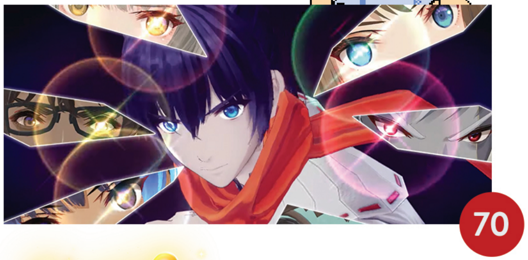
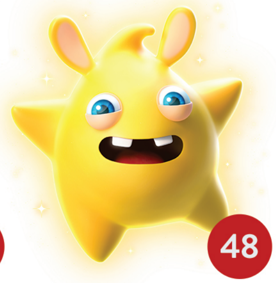
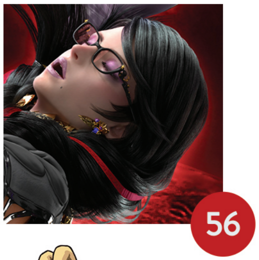
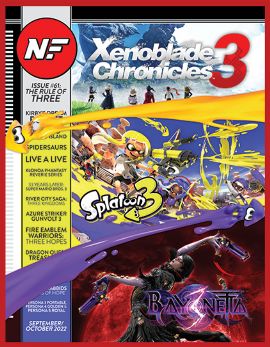








ON THE COVER

What happens when three different "3" games are all worthy of placement on the cover of the same magazine issue? Well, either one wins out over the other two, or they share the space by splitting it three ways! In what is certainly one of our wildest cover designs ever, Xenoblade Chronicles 3, Splatoon 3 and Bayonetta 3 have all claimed roughly one third of this issue's cover each. Apologies if the result is a little too out-there for you! (Blame the Inklings for the mess.)

SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER 2022

INBOX

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE NUMBER 3

OK, everyone get the voice of the Count from Sesame Street in your mind. Ready?

"One. Two. THREE!"

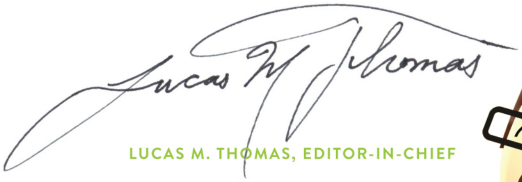
Yes, 3 is the number of the day, as this edition of Nintendo Force has been made to mark a truly unique moment in video game history. For the first and probably only time ever, Nintendo is publishing three "3s" back-to-back-to-back.

Xenoblade Chronicles 3 on July 29. Splatoon 3 on September 9. Bayonetta 3 on October 28!

I mean, what are the odds of three separate series all having their "3" games line up just like that? (In less than three months!?) You know how much we love to see a good common thread running through Nintendo's releases, and this one was just too obvious not to honor.

So, to celebrate this unique numerical nexus, we've put together The Rule of Three, an NF issue brought to you by the number 3. We have new coverage of our three cover games: a review (in progress) of Xenoblade Chronicles 3, and fresh previews of Splatoon 3 and Bayonetta 3. Then we've got reviews of other "3" games (or "Three" games), including Azure Striker Gunvolt 3, River City Saga: Three Kingdoms and Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes. Our main feature looks at some of the most prominent threequels in Nintendo history to ask "was the third time the charm?" and a secondary feature presents our wishlist for "3s" we still hope to see. The Retro section hosts articles on three different "3" games as well, and our Interview with Arc System Works' Kenji Sato circles back around to River City Saga: Three Kingdoms once more.

Hopefully all of this adds up to one fun reading experience!



LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #60:
JULY/AUGUST 2022

Our 60th publication pulled none of its punches as we brought you a whole bevy of hot-blooded beat-'em-ups! The River City coverage continues in this edition, as we've got our review of River City Saga: Three Kingdoms in the Download section ahead, as well as an Interview with one of its makers! After promoting a "2" game on the cover last time, though, it only made sense for us to count up to 3 next. So our Player's Poll questions looked ahead to our "3" theme by asking these three questions: 1) What is the best "3" game in history? (Any game with a 3 in its name qualifies.) 2) What's one thing the new Splatoon 3 needs to really succeed? And finally 3) If you could wish any "3" game into existence, which would you pick? As always, we've selected a selection of emailed responses. Let's peruse the latest Poll opinions thusly:

LETTERS

Super Mario Bros. 3 is probably the best #3 game I can think of. With the new feature of being able to go back and forth in each level without a barrier in the way, that probably makes it the best Mario game for its time.

Splatoon 3 needs to have a voting feature for more game modes or a creative mode feature for your own all-out battle. With the community making new battle modes, Splatoon 3 might attract other gamers who like creativity.

A #3 game I wish they would make is Unravel Three. The game's graphics and creativity have so much potential for more! Since they added two Yarnys in Unravel Two, three Yarnys would be really fun to figure out the puzzles with, and you would get another bonus player! **— GLO STIX**

Get ready to read the phrase "Super Mario Bros. 3" umpteen thousand times on two pages. To be fair, it's also at the top for me, so I can't sneer at the masses without being hypocritical. It deserves the praise that it gets, and it's a shame that no credits roll at the end, like in Odyssey. However, the web game Run 3 is really good for what it is. I don't know if it's a big thing outside of me and my friends' recognition, so check it out anyway!

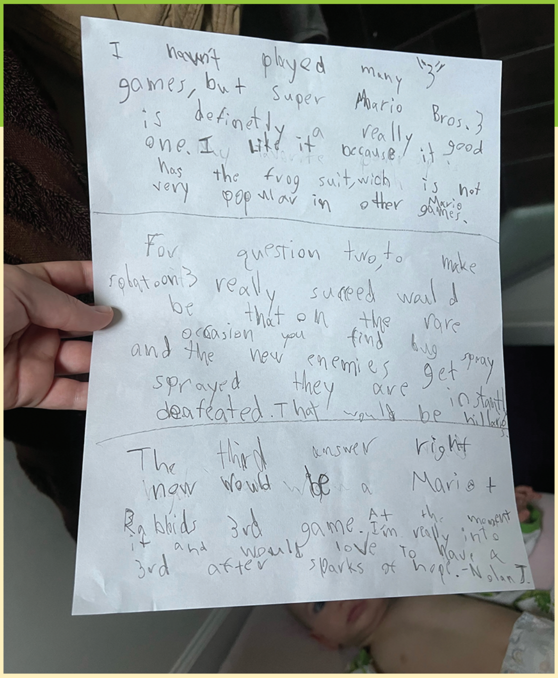
Splatoon 3 looks like it'll be amazing, but something that would up its amazingness would be to have some platforming. In the past games, the ability to swim up walls is pretty cool, and the technique could definitely be utilized in different areas. With or without a gun, 3D or 2D, it would be interesting to see Inklings act in one of Nintendo's specialties.

A series that could use a third game is Overcooked. The first two games were great, although kinda difficult to 100%. The problem with Overcooked is once you've beaten all the levels, it gets a bit repetitive. So what better way to fix that than with another game (not just DLC please)! **— MILO LOPEZ**

For me, Super Mario Bros. 3 is the ultimate "3" game. I've always been in love with the myriad secrets it holds, as well as its unique interactive world map, but upon replaying the game for the first time since I was in high school over 10 years ago, I gained a newfound appreciation for its level design too. It's hard for me to imagine another "3" that could do for me what SMB3 does.

I'll go with the easy out and say that Splatoon 3 needs better netcode to succeed. It will likely sell well and be a fun game anyway, but in order to truly live up to its potential both gameplay-wise and popularity-wise, the game will have to find a way to reduce the lag that some players experience and are very vocal about.

I know many gamers would love to see a true Banjo-Threeie, and I'm one of them. I know it would be a tricky — perhaps borderline impossible to sort out in terms of licensing and whatnot — but if a deal could be made to allow Playtonic to make the game with the full funding and oversight of Rare, then we could actually get the true Banjo-Threeie so many of us have dreamed about. **— ANDREW PEERMAN**



I haven't played many "3" games, but Super Mario Bros. 3 is definetly a really good one. I like it because it has the frog suit, which is not very popular in other Mario games.

For question two, to make splatoon 3 really succeed would be that on the rare occasion you find bug spray and the new enemies get sprayed they are instantly defeated. That would be killer.

The third answer right now would be a Mario + Rabbids 3rd game. At the moment I'm really into it and would love to have a 3rd after Sparks of hope. -Nolan J.

TRANSCRIPTION OF A HAND-WRITTEN SUBMISSION

I haven't played many "3" games, but Super Mario Bros. 3 is definitely a really good one. I like it because it has the Frog Suit, which is not very popular in other Mario games.

For Question #2, to make Splatoon 3 really succeed my idea would be that on rare occasion you'd find bug spray, and when the new enemies get sprayed they are instantly defeated. That would be hilarious.

The third answer right now would be a Mario + Rabbids third game. At the moment I'm really into it and would love to have a third after Sparks of Hope. **— NOLAN J.**

Thanks for taking the time to write out this whole letter, Nolan! And special shout-out to the surprised baby making a cameo in the corner of the photo.

Shin Megami Tensei III (or Nocturne in the West) launched SMT into a new era mechanically and introduced some core features like the Press Turn mechanic that are still in SMT games today. Final Fantasy III, although never released in the West, is easily the best Final Fantasy game on the Famicom, especially with a banger track like Eternal Wind. And I'm going to add an odd one: King's Quest III: To Heir Is Human. No one seems to like it but it's got a soft spot in my heart.

I think that Splatoon really needs better matchmaking to survive. 2 had alright matchmaking, but I still found myself at Level 14 facing off against a team of Level 80s and 90s.

If I could have another "3" . . . I'm gonna say Famicom Detective Club. It would be weird to have a game literally with Famicom in the title to not be on the Famicom, but I really enjoy the series! I think we could do with another mystery with Detective-kun and Ayumi! **— RANTARO R.**

My personal favorite #3 game is Mega Man Battle Network 3 (Blue). Before it I had only fantasy-esque games, so it was my first futuristic game and very special to me. The music was so catchy and all the bosses and areas were cool. It was my first Mega Man game and it needed and helped me develop a skill set I didn't have before. I never had a game requiring me to be able to react and think on my feet like Mega Man! **— BEN W.**

Sonic 3 & Knuckles. It built on all the things introduced in the earlier Sonic games. And it has Knuckles in the title! **— KYLA H.**

The best game with a "3" in it is, no choice, Super Mario Bros. 3. Because it has a world map, you can fly, and it has the Koopalings! In my opinion it is by far the best 3 game ever.

The best thing in Splatoon 3 would be local games because I am not allowed to play online. :(

The best "3" ever would be Portal 3! I know it's probably not going to happen, but I would love it if there was a third sequel (threequel?) to Portal 2. **— BENJAMIN HILTY**

Greetings and Salutations Nintendo Force!

My favorite "3" game is Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury. I picked it up on launch and had a blast with it. Mario 3D World is one of my favorite games to play with my friends when they come to my house. (I have a full setup down in my basement that contains some of your posters.) The level design and music are super clever! (Double Cherry Pass, Super Bell Hill and World Bowser anyone?) And Bowser's Fury is such a fun little extra world that seems like Super Mario Odyssey merged with 3D World. It was a cool extra showing us the future of developing new Mario games – kinda like a demo of sorts. I loved all of the cute cats and the platforming designs were phenomenal.

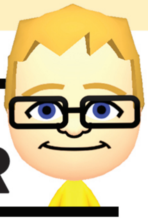
There are so many games I want to see a threequel to. (Mario Galaxy 3, Nintendogs 3, Donkey Kong Returns 3, etc.) But the ones I want to see the most are either Mario Maker 3 or Super Monkey Ball 3. I have been a diehard fan of both franchises since I was a kid, and if they find a great new mechanic like 3D Mario in Mario Maker or an open-world Monkey Ball (a man can dream) they could be instant classics.

Thank you for your reviews (now planning to buy Shredder's Revenge and The Cowabunga Collection for my Dad's birthday). **— JUST A DOGGO**

Happy Birthday, Dad!

Super Mario 3D Land may not be the best "3" game (and may only technically qualify), but it is definitely underrated. The first original 3D Mario game on a handheld, with really fun gameplay, level design and a postgame just as big as the main campaign – it's a game that should definitely get more attention than it does! **— ZACHARY H.**

CARTER'S CORNER



Hello again!

Last time I asked you to guess whether I'll be playing Pokémon Scarlet or Pokémon Violet. And the answer is . . . Pokémon Violet! (I think?) We're still having trouble deciding in our family!

Today I have three things to talk about!

1) Mario + Rabbids Sparks of Hope launches on October 20, 2022, just one month before Scarlet & Violet on November 18. I hope I can play a lot of it by then! Maybe I'll play a lot on my birthday? It's on November 6, right between both of them!

2) Speaking of Scarlet & Violet, we got more info! Paldean Wooper is a new regional variant, Fidough is another Fairy-type chef (because they like Alcremie?) and Cetitan is a tough Ice-type whale. With legs! I'll catch it for sure!

3) Too many threes! Splatoon 3. Bayonetta 3. Xenoblade Chronicles 3. River City Saga: Three Kingdoms. Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes. Mario Kart 8 Deluxe: Booster Course Pass – Wave 3! (Well, not yet. But probably pretty soon.)

Quiz time! What will be my team for Mario + Rabbids Sparks of Hope? Look at my Dad's new preview on Page 48 to see the three new heroes!

See you next time!

THE GREAT FRAME UP

Hey, NF Folks! First, I am fulfilling your request to send pictures of NF posters. I was thrilled when I got the first of your three-piece Smash Ultimate panorama, as I have been wanting to hang that art since it was first revealed in 2018. I even went a step further and got it framed! For anyone who's curious, the dimensions of the completed poster are roughly 11 inches tall by 61 inches wide.

Now for the Player's Poll questions!

1) Surely I'm cheating a bit, but the best game with a "3" (or 3-adjacent word) in the title has to be The Legend of Zelda: Tri-Force Heroes. A lot of people slept on this game due to the fact that it really only makes sense to play locally with three people, but I recently came up with the requisite consoles and people, and we are having a blast!

2) I think Splatoon 3 will sell reasonably well regardless of what it does, but I think prolonged support with Splatfests and free DLC (i.e. several years) would bolster its success. Personally, I would like to see more of the mechanics from the campaign appear in actual battle stages.

3) Perhaps this is also cheating, but after seeing what was possible in Metroid Dread, I'd love a (Super) Metroid 3 remake, ideally built from the ground up! The original holds up great, of course, but I'm ready to re-experience this classic with a fresh pair of eyes.

Thanks for all your hard work on the magazine! **– JUSTIN DO**

And thank *you*, Justin, for submitting this fine photo! Looks like the framing turned out really well!

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Nolan J.**, the winner of our "3"-themed Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to three questions about the next generation of Pokémon!

QUESTION #1

The decision of whether to play the Scarlet or Violet version has been a tough one in the Thomas home. Which will you pick, and why?

QUESTION #2

The Pokédex is expanding again! If you could pick one old 'mon to get a new form, evolution or variant, which one would you choose?

QUESTION #3

How do you plan to tackle the new open world of Scarlet & Violet? Will you freely explore, or buckle down and focus on tasks like challenging Gyms?

Send your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #62" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win their choice of either Pokémon Scarlet or Pokémon Violet!

NINTENDO FORCE

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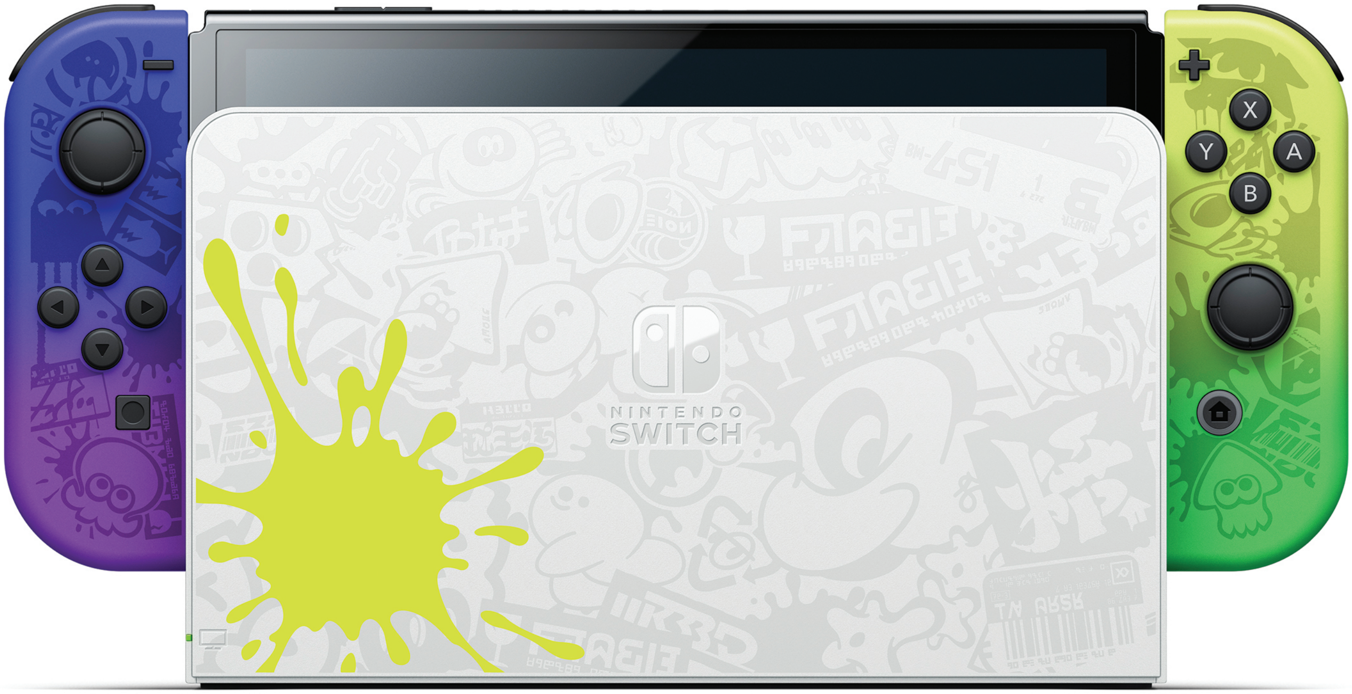
Failed New Weapon Ideas for Splatoon 3

BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN



Splatoon 3's OLEDs

Nintendo's giving the (outgoing?) hardware a fresh splash of color.

WE'VE NOW ENTERED the 53rd consecutive year of Nintendo Switch Pro speculation, and it's become a generational hobby to think about when Nintendo will finally reveal an upgraded Switch hardware model. It's something fun for grandparents to do with their grandkids!

Yes, there's still no word on when we can expect to see a Switch Pro or a Switch 4K or a Super Switch 2U XL, but while that interminable wait lingers on even further, the Big N is at least giving the still-latest hardware revamp a big new splash of color. Feast your eyes on the Nintendo Switch – OLED Model inspired by the new Splatoon 3!

Featuring a big splatter of faux ink that will cause all parents to do a double take and worry that their kids have spilled something sticky on the Switch Dock every time they catch a glimpse of it out of the corner of their eye, this OLED Model looks like it came straight from the middle of a Turf War in the Splatlands.

That seems to be exactly what the designers were going for, too, since the Joy-Cons are similarly splattered, but in the colors of opposing Turf War teams. One has a blue gradient with an Octoling icon, while the other has a yellow gradient and an image of an Inkling in squid form. Only the front faces of the Joy-Cons are colored that way, though – the undersides are the same style of white as the Dock.

The Switch itself, meanwhile, will also have a manic mess of Splatoon series images splashed across its back in varying shades of black.

Similarly, an all-new Pro Controller design (seen to the right) is making an appeal to Splatoon 3 players as well. It's condensed the color war to the confines of a single controller, and also looks great!

These new hues of hardware are on sale as of August 26 in the United States, with the OLED Model's MSRP set at $359.99 and the Pro Controller going for $74.99.

Just be advised that the Splatoon 3 game is not included in the box if you buy the new OLED Model! You'll still have to spring for that purchase separately. All in all that makes for a fairly expensive proposition here, but I'm sure plenty of Splatoon series super fans won't be bothered by that a bit!
– LUCAS

> "I've personally still never invested in an OLED Model of Switch, because I am one of the fools who continues to believe that Nintendo is *just about* to reveal the Pro hardware any day now. (I'm sure they actually will right when I stop waiting for it to happen.) – **LUCAS**"

"Yuji Naka really started something. Thanks to him, we've finally seen in black and white that the King of Pop made music for the Blue Blur! Though people aren't thrilled that Jackson's tunes were cut out of Sonic Origins. That's bad, that's bad, and you know it. – JONATHAN"

Confirmed at Long Last!

Michael Jackson really did contribute to the Sonic 3 soundtrack!

WHO WAS THE "real" Michael Jackson, and what did he really do? It's a question that's been asked for decades. How many nose jobs did he get? Did he really prank call Russell Crowe all those times? Some of these burning questions about the King of Pop may never be answered, but now at least one of them can be put to rest: Yuji Naka, former head of Sonic Team, has recently confirmed that Michael Jackson *did* contribute to the Sonic the Hedgehog 3 soundtrack.

This had long been the rumor, but exactly how much or how little he worked on the game has remained shrouded in mystery. In fact, Brad Buxer, Jackson's former keyboardist, told the Abbey Road Institute as recently as April 2022 that he'd "been doing all the Sega Sonic the Hedgehog cues because the way Michael works is, he'll tell Sega he'll do it and then he says 'Brad, you do it.' . . . So I think we did one cue together with Michael. One. And the rest I had to do myself. He had nothing in mind for that. Nothing."

Still, Buxer's side of the story wasn't enough for everyone, and Michael (now deceased) and the development team on Sonic 3 have never officially commented on the topic.

That changed on June 23 when Yuji Naka tweeted "Oh my god, the music for Sonic 3 has changed, even though SEGA Official uses Michael Jackson's music." He was talking about how Sonic Origins, a recent collection that includes Sonic 3, does not include the songs that he attributes to Jackson.

So now we know Michael Jackson's (and Brad Buxer's?) music really was in the game, just in time to *not* listen to it in Origins! **– JONATHAN**

E3 Plans a Comeback

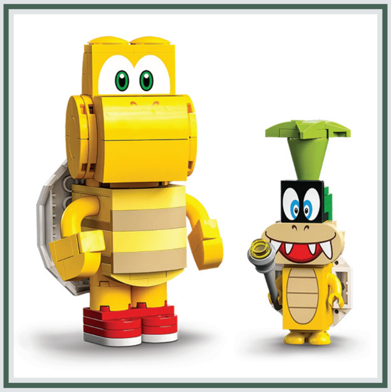
Can the game industry's signature event really be resuscitated?

IT'S BEEN OVER three years now since E3 last held an in-person expo, and I personally declared the event to be dead a while back. Still, there's a stubborn organizing force that refuses to let the iconic annual event fade away into the annals of history. Its corpse is being exhumed once more.

After the cancellation of E3 2020, then the shifting of E3 2021 to being an online-only "experience" and the cancellation (again) of E3 2022, E3 2023 is currently optimistically planned to be the one that finally brings the brand back to being the banner flying over an in-person event. My skepticism over whether or not this plan will really fly *would* be at an all-time high . . . except one critical change in tactics gives me a little more reason to believe they could actually pull this one off: Reedpop has been placed in charge of it.

Reedpop is a convention-organizing company that has previously handled the logistics of the PAX events, as well as New York Comic Con and the Star Wars Celebration, all of them massive in-person spectacles that have endured even amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. If anyone can breathe life back into E3, it's them.

Still, though, it'll be an uphill battle. The industry seems to have largely moved on, and Nintendo in particular might just want to stick with doing their own Directs! **– LUCAS**



LEGO Super Mario Continues to Grow!

The series is expanding again, and will now feature the massive Mighty Bowser!

IF ANY OF you have wondered if the LEGO Super Mario line has been successful, look no further than all of the recent announcements and new releases! LEGO Princess Peach (with Lemmy) was just released on August 1, along with seven new retail sets, a fifth wave of the buildable character packs and a promo set featuring Yellow Yoshi. Among the retail sets, Iggy appears with other enemies, Fuzzy and Spike are featured in two sets, you can visit Yoshi's House and Mario can don Kuribo's Shoe! There are two sets that together build Peach's Castle. One set features Peach's Cat Suit and Kamek flying around the tallest spire, and the other has Ludwig, Bowser and the rest of Peach's Castle. I'm not a big fan of the random placement of all of the Koopalings, but oh well. We'll see where Wendy, Roy and Morton Jr. end up.

Another major announcement outside of the main line was the next entry in the larger Super Mario line, and that was Bowser. But we're not talking about a Bowser that can fit in your hand – we're talking about the "Mighty Bowser" set that has nearly 3,000 pieces and stands nearly 13 inches tall! He's very posable and formidable, and his base looks like it's pulled right out of Bowser's Castle, with banners, spikes, stone and fire. Naturally, the whole thing will interact with Starter Pack heroes. This beast will be released on October 1 this year for $270.

While you're at the LEGO site deciding what to purchase, do me a favor and take a gander at the incredible Atari 2600 set they just dropped! Following in the footsteps of the LEGO NES that launched back in 2020, it's a nostalgia-fueled trip back in time that includes recreations of Atari's iconic one-button joystick and three classic games: Asteroids, Centipede and Adventure. I hope the console releases continue! SNES next?!

Popping Up Again

Three Houses characters are everywhere!

GOOD SMILE IS is having a Pop Up Parade with the Fire Emblem: Three Houses license, and they're set to march out six different figures featuring characters from the game. Claude, Dimitri, Edelgard, Lysithea, Felix and Bernadetta make up the series. The idea behind the parade is affordable prices and quick successive releases.

Edelgard and Bernadetta (both seen above, and both from the Black Eagles) are set to release this November, then the Blue Lions in December will be followed by the Golden Deer in January. Each of these 7-inch figures will set you back around $35, so you can decide if the set is worth $210 plus taxes and shipping. They do have fantastic detail for their size, though, as is characteristic of all of Good Smile's releases.

BY BRETT MARTIN

Celebrate Shantae with a Statue!

Marking the milestone of her first game's 20th anniversary.

BACK IN 2002, a little gem of a game called Shantae was released on the Game Boy Color, and it became a total sensation. Two decades later, Limited Run Games is releasing a 20th anniversary statue of the half-genie heroine in collaboration with her creators Erin and Matt Bozon. The statue lights up if the acrylic Game Boy boxes are inserted into the base; these are attained through ordering the collector's edition or ordering them separately at the Limited Run site. The statue is $135 and $25 more will net you the acrylics. The statue is on pre-order now but will be shipping about nine months after pre-orders end in late August. (If you miss that window, you might still be able to buy one later on at the Limited Run Retail store.) The figure stands 10" tall off the base, and while the final product might differ some based on production methods, as it stands now it's stunning!

New Nendos

Buy these figures . . . for Shovelry!

IT'S DIFFICULT TO keep up with all of the Nendoroids that Good Smile churns out every year! Sans and Papyrus Nendoroids just went up for pre-order not too long ago, and we now know those will appear in November for Japan and January 2023 for the West. Undyne is also now on the slate, as a painted prototype was shown at Anime Expo. She does not have a release date, but she will come with her signature eyepatch, spear and armor. Another beloved indie character had his painted look revealed at Anime Expo as well: Shovel Knight! He has beautiful metallic paint, shiny golden accents and, of course, his trusty Shovel Blade. Other recent reveals include unpainted sculpts of Shantae and Klonoa, painted Thanatos from Hades and announcements for Cuphead and Mugman. They're really doing those small studio hits justice! Just a little while ago we also heard about an upcoming King Dedede Nendoroid as well. Looking at Good Smile announcements always takes patience, as the time from announcement to actually being able to purchase can be upwards of a year and a half. But they're always worth the wait!

A Trio of Treats

Three new Nintendo-themed desserts debut!

IF YOU'RE STILL looking for new ways to beat the summer heat, then you should beat feet to the nearest Cold Stone Creamery!

Nintendo and Cold Stone have teamed up for a new promotion linking three big Switch hits to three new ice cream flavor creations.

First up is the Island Getaway. Inspired by Animal Crossing: New Horizons, it's got chocolate ice cream accented by strawberries and bananas. Next, there's the Superstar Sprinkle Blast, paying homage to Mario Party Superstars. It's got cake batter ice cream, yellow cake chunks, blue frosting and, of course, plenty of rainbow sprinkles. Finally, Kirby and the Forgotten Land is repped by The Mighty Pink Puff. It's got strawberries, mini marshmallows and caramel sitting atop a bowl of strawberry ice cream. Kirby'd inhale that for sure!

Officially these treats are only set to be available until the end of September – but then Nintendo's last "limited time" item with Cold Stone, a Mario Kart ice cream cake, has remained continuously available at many locations since its introduction years ago. So maybe these will stick around for the long haul too! **– LUCAS**

Nintendo Pictures!

The Big N has made another big acquisition.

DO YOU REMEMBER the Pikmin Short Movies? They were three animated shorts that Nintendo commissioned to both promote the Pikmin brand and indulge Mr. Miyamoto's cinematic aspirations. They first went on sale on Wii U and 3DS in 2014 (marking Nintendo's brief flirtation with charging for pure video content with no game attached to it), and as of 2020, they've been made available to watch for free via the official Nintendo YouTube channel.

If you've never watched them – or haven't watched them in a while – you should. Because doing so might give you a clue about upcoming Nintendo-branded animated video content . . . because Nintendo just bought out the studio that made those shorts years ago!

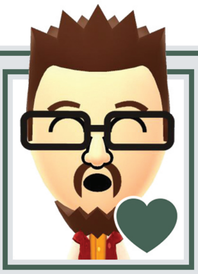
Dynamo Pictures was the name of the company. They've instantly been rebranded as Nintendo Pictures, and it's safe to assume that they're already hard at work on new short films, or even TV shows, or even feature-length *movies*, starring the Big N's characters. If I had to venture a guess, I'd say that they'd start with more Pikmin content, since they've tackled that franchise before and wouldn't be starting from scratch. But really anything is on the table!

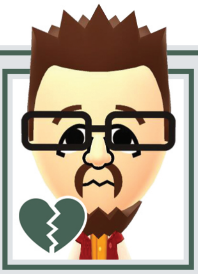
Dynamo Pictures has a long history of contributing to big brands beyond those owned by the Big N. They assisted Studio Ghibli on Earwig and the Witch. They helped Goku and his crew come back to the big screen in Dragon Ball Super: Super Hero (which just recently opened in theaters in the States). They've worked on Capcom brands like Resident Evil, Mega Man and Ace Attorney. They've done a lot!

Given their track record, they could surely be entrusted with any of Nintendo's biggest IPs. It's just a matter of time before we learn which will be first! **– LUCAS**

> "Note that this "Nintendo Pictures" announcement is not related to the previously announced Super Mario Bros. animated film starring Chris Pratt, as that's still in the works at Illumination and still set to be distributed by Universal Pictures. It was originally planned to open before the end of this year, but was recently pushed back a few months. Its new opening date is set to be April 7, 2023 in the United States. – **LUCAS**"

Great!
The new Cold Stone creations look yummy!





Oh.
My kids will probably eat them all before I get a bite.

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

SUMMERTIME TECHNICALLY LASTS until September 22, so even though Splatoon 3 is going on sale on September 9, it still counts as a summer game! That's a thematic match to some of the content we'll be getting in this sequel, since it partially takes place in a sun-drenched desert. Not the kind of place you'd expect to find lifeforms that evolved from squids, but the Inklings make it work somehow! See more on Page 40.

THE COVER GAME for our last issue should have been getting its final passes of polish as this NF edition wrapped, as it was previously set to land in the Switch eShop in September. Unfortunately, it's been hit with a last-minute delay! No new release window has been announced yet, but here's hoping River City will re-open for tourists again soon!

A REMARKABLE MILESTONE for the community of video game fan translators will happen on September 27, as that's the day The Legend of Heroes: Trails from Zero will go on sale in English for the first time – fueled by a translated script that was originally put together by a team of fans! Maybe it will convince other companies to take a look at fan translations as a way to officially release Japanese games in the West? More on Page 54.

BREAKING THE STREAK of all the games on this page having numbers in their names is the game that could have been called Mario + Rabbids 2, but instead is simply subtitled Sparks of Hope. Maybe the devs ditched the numeral because of how fresh and new the gameplay is promised to be this time? We'll see how fresh on October 20. Check Page 48!

BACK IN 2017, we got Super Mario Odyssey in October. It had a lot of costume changes! In 2019, Luigi's Mansion 3 brought us family-friendly frights on October 31 precisely. And just last year, Metroid Dread kicked the fear factor up a notch in October as well. Seems like Nintendo's got a tradition going of releasing a Halloween-appropriate game each year! The next will be this tale of three witches, debuting this October 28. See Page 56!

WHILE IT'S TRUE that 1 + 2 = 3, Nintendo still hasn't been able to solve the equation for what this game's third official release date should be. The newest of new rumors is claiming that soldiers won't be able to report for duty at Re-Boot Camp until 2023. Is that true? Or will Nintendo still find a way to start these Wars before the end of 2022?

> "We've got an excellent array of new numbered releases leading us through to the end of 2022 – and this isn't even all of them! Taken all together, they're all going to add up to a whole lot of fun for Nintendo Switch players. Buying all of these would certainly subtract quite a large amount from any bank account, but just think how your entertainment time will be multiplied as a result! (Sorry if that causes any division in your household.) – **LUCAS**"

THE GRANDIOSE EXPANSE of the all-new Xenoblade Chronicles 3 will take well over 100 hours to fully explore . . . but Nintendo knows that some players will still be craving more! That's why, once again, the base game will only be the starting point, and much more content will be added to the adventure in the months ahead.

The Xenoblade Chronicles 3 Expansion Pass has already launched Wave 1 of its content, with new items and color variations for character outfits available since this past July 29, when the main game first went on sale. But three other waves will follow!

Wave 2 is planned to debut before the end of 2022. It will add a new Challenge Battle mode, a new Hero character and new outfits.

Wave 3 is scheduled for sometime in the first four months of 2023. Its content is planned to be the same as Wave 2 – it'll just have some kind of different Challenge Battle, a different new Hero and a different set of new outfits.

Wave 4, though, is where the Pass will pay off. It's promising a "new original story scenario" – and Xenoblade Chronicles 2 players know what that means. A brand-new standalone game! (Most likely.)

When this same promise was given for the XC2 Expansion Pass a few years ago, the story scenario we ended up getting was the full quest called "Torna ~ The Golden Country." It turned out to be a huge prequel tale – so huge, in fact, that it was also sold separately as its own game, and even got its own physical cartridge release!

. . . Which actually means that, if you're a physical cartridge aficionado, you might want to actually not buy this $29.99 Expansion Pass right away, and instead wait to see if they follow the same pattern again with whatever Wave 4 ends up being. The promo art for the Pass (seen below), seems to hint at an even stronger cross-over with the previous games? We'll see!

KIRBY'S NEW DIGITAL-ONLY DREAM

HAL Laboratory has just rolled out another eShop exclusive: the multiplayer-focused food-fighting fun of Kirby's Dream Buffet!

THREE ISSUES AGO, this same spot hosted an article called "Kirby: Star of the eShop!" in which I made the case that the Pink Puffball prioritizes digital downloads much more so than any other Nintendo hero. Now, just half a year later, we've got another example supporting the accuracy of that claim.

Kirby's Dream Buffet has recently rolled into the Switch eShop. It's yet another eShop-exclusive appearance for the pudgy powerhouse!

This one is the most ambitious of them all, as well. Whereas many of the digital-only Kirby titles before this point were just different spins on the "Smash Bros. Lite with All Kirbys" idea, Dream Buffet is instead entirely original and unlike anything we've seen before: It's a four-Kirby multiplayer food fight!

The story has it that the constantly hungry Kirby one day gets shrunken down by a magical fork. This makes the normal-sized cake he was about to inhale look like it's the size of a skyscraper instead! He's not the only one salivating, though: Three other Kirbys appear, and they all begin to compete to see who can get the most to eat!

The competition plays out in three different ways: There are races to see who can eat the most strawberries on the way to a goal, Mario Party-esque minigames where the Kirbys compete for more fruit in contained spaces and, finally, all-out Battle Royales in which they fight it out while wielding new Copy Food Abilities. (Classic Kirby powers remixed to fit the food theme.) In the end, the winner is the one who has gained the most weight!

Kirby's Dream Buffet just dropped into the eShop two days before this issue went to press, so our review will be in our next edition. For now, I'll just enjoy it serving as the cherry on top of the Star of the eShop article! **— LUCAS**

Little Nemo's Waking Up!

After decades lying dormant, the Dream Master is finally leaping back into action!

NOBODY OWNS NEMO.

Not anymore, at least. Originally, the character of Little Nemo was created to star in full-color, full-page comics printed in Sunday edition newspapers . . . over a century ago! Artist Winsor McCay – praised as "the first original genius of the comic strip medium" by comic historians – took readers on weekly psychedelic trips into the land of dreams, with stories told from the point of view of this little boy who'd always find himself waking up by falling out of his bed by the end of each Sunday strip. But since those comics were printed so long ago (the weekly strips stopped being published in 1927), the character of Little Nemo, the setting of Slumberland and all the supporting elements of McCay's tales are all now in the public domain!

If you're unfamiliar with the public domain, it basically means that once a creative work is old enough, it can't be copyrighted any longer. It's available for anyone to use, for any purpose! A purpose like, perhaps, video games!

Nintendo fans who've been gaming since the NES era will recall Capcom's classic platformer named Little Nemo: The Dream Master. It was a whimsical adventure on par with their best work of the era, from the Mega Man series to Disney-licensed games like Chip 'N Dale: Rescue Rangers and DuckTales. But Capcom never followed up on it! We never got a Little Nemo 2 – and, even worse, the original game has still never been rereleased in any more modern form. So it's about time some other team picked up Nemo's torch!

That's what's happening now. Twice over, in fact! There are currently two different Little Nemo games in the works, and both are currently planned to launch in the Switch eShop in 2023. (Two teams are allowed to both do their own interpretations because, again, Little Nemo's publicly owned!)

First up, take a look at the screens above for a glimpse at Little Nemo and the Guardians of Slumberland. It just completed a Kickstarter campaign a few months ago, bringing in $80,263.

Guardians of Slumberland looks like it's building on the foundation of Capcom's NES Nemo game with its colorful, cartoony style, shrimpier proportions for our protagonist and plenty of candy being thrown around. It won't echo Capcom's mechanic of taking control of animals, though – rather, Guardians of Slumberland stars a Nemo who equips himself with toys to attack his foes. A yo-yo becomes a basic melee weapon; a pogo stick lets him bounce on top of spiky enemies without taking damage. Also, in what might be the most wholesome thing I've seen in a game in a long time, he can choose one favorite stuffed animal to cuddle with when he goes to sleep – and when he then appears in the dream world, that stuffie is there too, and they come to life to serve as a tag-along little buddy character! Examples include a light-up snail who helps Nemo explore places like dark caves and a rolling robot who's equipped with scanners to help him locate hidden areas. Cute and functional!

If you'd rather play a Nemo game that gets all the way back to his roots, though, look no further than Little Nemo and the Nightmare Fiends. It was also Kickstarted, and also raised just over $80K, but it's taking a totally different approach: being as faithful to the look of Winsor McCay's original comics as possible! Nemo looks just like he did when he was first printed in the New York Herald decades before even my grandparents were born, and he's been painstakingly animated by hand to get each action just right. This Nemo leaves the toys at home in favor of a wooden sword – and he's also joined by three other playable allies with their own unique skills. Flip (seen below) can swing using spring-loaded boxing gloves, The Princess can hover and fires bursts of magic and Peony, a new, original character, can climb up sheer walls and use fireworks bombs.

Both of these games have captured my interest and attention – they make me want to do my own Nemo stories. Maybe I will! Anyone can! **– LUCAS**

Countdown to Shutdown #3

A third selection of eShop games to grab before they're gone!

WELL, WE'RE REALLY getting into the eShop endgame now.

By the time print copies of this issue land in mailboxes around the globe, we'll be past another major milestone on the journey to the total shutdown of both the Wii U and 3DS eShops: the last day to redeem eShop cards for store credit. That means that between now and the Final Day coming up in March 2023, the only way to add funds to be able to keep making eShop purchases on Wii U or 3DS is now going online to Nintendo.com and getting your systems all linked up together with your own unique Nintendo Network ID. Then, when you add funds through your Switch or Nintendo's online storefront, they should also show up on your older Wii U or 3DS and be usable for last-minute shopping sprees there.

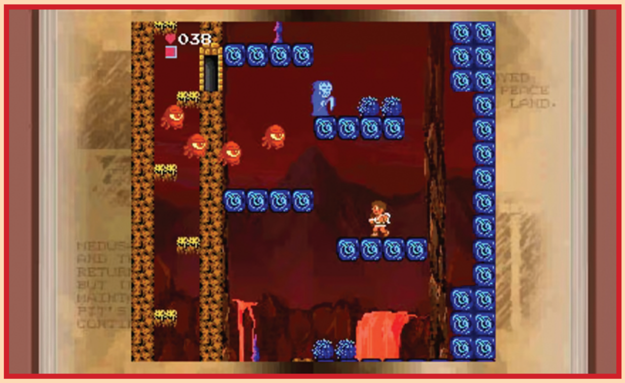
It's a complicated process! It's like Nintendo is slowly dialing up the frustration factor of trying to shop on the older systems bit by bit until no one will want to bother with them any more, and will instead be naturally encouraged to fully leave the past behind and leap into the comparably luxuriously easy way to browse and buy digital games on the Switch instead.

But since complicated isn't the same thing as impossible, we've still got some more game recommendations to share before the eShops are shuttered for good. Here, then, is our third set of selections for you to consider buying before the digital doors close forever: three picks from Wii U, and three from the 3DS! **— LUCAS**

THE DENPA MEN 3: THE RISE OF DIGITOLL

GENIUS SONORITY IS best known for making Pokémon games like Shuffle, Trozei, Colosseum and Battle Revolution. Catching cute little monsters and tossing them into turn-based battles is in their blood! But when it came time for the team to make their own original franchise, they decided to put men on the menu instead. The first three Denpa Men games are 3DS exclusives, and the thing that makes the whole franchise stand out is the option to catch baby men in pajamas floating in the real world around you with the console's built-in camera. Augmented Reality games like this largely died out when the Switch was born, so if you want this little piece of off-brand Poké-man, this is probably your last chance to grab it before these cute little digital wave riders drop to low tide forever. **— JONATHAN**

MAY 2014

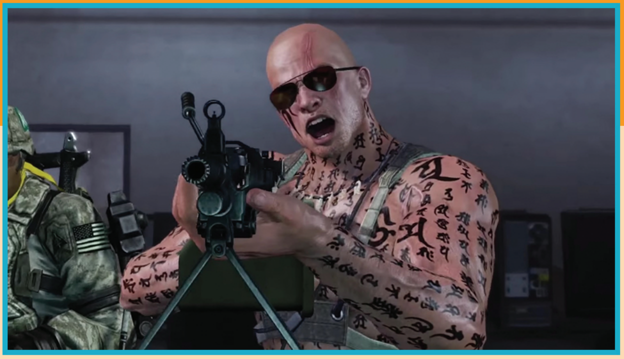


3D CLASSICS: KID ICARUS

WE RECOMMENDED THAT you all take another look at 3D Classics: Urban Champion last time, but I want to amplify that and add that the entire line of 3D Classics titles is worth giving another glance before they're gone. The glasses-free 3D technology of the 3DS is a feature that may very well never be seen again in any future piece of video game hardware, so any showcase of that tech is going to be fun to hold on to so you can pull it out of a drawer decades down the road and amaze your grandkids with it!

What's more, titles like Kid Icarus were made more accessible and easier to play in these re-releases. Jumping is easier in this version than the NES original, as the developers retconned the slowfall mechanic from the Game Boy sequel back into Pit's first adventure here! You also get a lot of deep, colorful backgrounds in 3D Classics: Kid Icarus that will just be lost to time going forward. What a shame that we'll be left with only the indefinitive original! **— LUCAS**

AUGUST 2011



DEVIL'S THIRD

TIME HAS BEEN both cruel and kind to Devil's Third.

This strange, sloppy and salacious 2015 Wii U exclusive has since lost its online mode (which made up at least 1/3 of its total value), though that hasn't done much to affect how much people are willing to pay for it. Physical copies of the game now run anywhere from $200 to $900! That's a bit much. The game's offline campaign mode is alternately exhilarating and unintentionally hilarious, working as tribute to, and parody of, the testosterone-drenched action game idiocy of the '90s and '00s, but it's not worth three times (or more) of what it originally cost at retail.

Thankfully, the game is still up on the Wii U eShop for a more reasonable price of $29.99. Nintendo isn't likely to publish anything like Devil's Third ever again, and it could end up being the final home console title from director Tomonobu Itagaki (best known for the Ninja Gaiden and Dead or Alive franchises), so fiddle with this devil while you still can, folks! **— JONATHAN**

DECEMBER 2015

DUCKTALES: REMASTERED

LIKE DEVIL'S THIRD and Dillon's Dead-Heat Breakers, DuckTales: Remastered did have a physical release available at one point, so it's not going to be *entirely* unobtainable once the Wii U digital storefront shuts down . . . it's just going to become an eBay exclusive instead of an eShop exclusive. Prices for the out-of-print Wii U disc are reasonable as of this writing, but if you want to secure the lowest price and the ease of owning the game digitally, you only have a few more months to act! (Uncle Scrooge is such a penny-pincher that he wouldn't want anyone paying more than they had to in order to play his adventure.)

WayForward's work bringing this NES classic out of the '80s and into the modern era with a total graphical revamp was wonderful, and the soundtrack is similarly sensational even now, nine years post-release. What surprises me the most is that this game didn't inspire similar visual overhauls of other classic Capcom Disney games. We did a whole feature way back in NF #4 wishlisting all the games we hoped to see remastered next, but none ever were! **— LUCAS**

AUGUST 2013

DILLON'S DEAD-HEAT BREAKERS

ONE OF NINTENDO'S unsung new heroes who emerged during the 3DS era, Dillon, hasn't been seen on the Nintendo Switch outside of an appearance in Super Smash Bros. Ultimate as an Assist Trophy. He looks a bit different there, as that rougher 'n tougher design originated in Dillon's Dead-Heat Breakers, which took the previous Dillon titles' Western motif and action/tower defense elements and combined them with a post-apocalyptic setting, new racing segments and parts to play for a new character: an anthropomorphic animal version of your very own Mii! Dillon's Dead-Heat Breakers is somewhat unique from many titles to occupy this spot: While it's only available digitally in North America, Europe and Japan got physical releases. It's just a shame that the 3DS was the only Nintendo portable to feature region locking! **— DAVID**

MAY 2018

AFFORDABLE SPACE ADVENTURES

THE LARGEST LOSSES when the Wii U and 3DS eShops shut down will be the game experiences that were tailor-made to those specific systems and their unique hardware — like this game, which tapped into the potential of the Wii U GamePad to an even greater degree than most of Nintendo's own first-party products from the same era. Its handheld screen became home to a critical instrument panel that let you monitor your spaceship's systems and adjust their performance in response to each new obstacle you encountered while exploring alien worlds. What's more, the responsibilities for bringing your craft safely through each environment could be split among three different players — co-op games built for three are exceedingly rare, and this one was done so well! If you still have your Wii U hooked up, a couple of spare Remotes and at least two friends, consider Affordable Space Adventures before it blasts off. **— LUCAS**

APRIL 2015

Lightning Strikes Thrice

AZURE STRIKER GUNVOLT 3

ONE THING I cannot help but ask myself about Azure Striker Gunvolt 3 is whether or not it should have that "3" in its name.

That's not an indictment of the game's quality at all, mind you. If anything, it's quite the opposite: Gunvolt 3 is practically like a new beginning for the series, and bearing that number 3 in its title may even be doing it a disservice!

For starters, the game takes place hundreds of years after the previous Gunvolt entries (not counting the alternate timeline of the Gunvolt Chronicles: Luminous Avenger iX games), and, to paraphrase "Weird Al" Yankovic, "everything you know is gone." So we're in a separate era from before, albeit with some ties to the past.

Developer Inti Creates has been here once before, but when that happened, they made "Mega Man ZX" instead of "Mega Man Zero 5." Of course, circumstances were different then, with ZX being on a whole new platform: the Nintendo DS.

In Gunvolt 3, the main character is different as well. You're playing as a Battle Priestess named Kirin, whose objective is to hunt down a group of Adepts whose power has grown out of control, known as "Primal Dragons." She plays similar to Gunvolt in some ways, but different in others.

Most specifically, she can throw her enchanted talismans at enemies in much the same way as Gunvolt would use Tags to mark his foes for a blast from his Flashfield. But while Gunvolt's Tags give his Flashfield something to home in on, Kirin's talismans instead weaken foes for her main attack: slashing with her sword, crafted from her pewter staff. You can attack without using the talismans, but most enemies will be more resistant to your sword slashes without them.

The way you attack with the sword is just slightly off-putting in itself, as these two attacks are mapped in much the same way as Gunvolt's attacks are. Talismans, like Tags, are set to the Y Button as the default, while the sword occupies the R2 Button, just as the Flashfield did. You can remap it if you really want to, but I couldn't think of a better placement at the time, and it wasn't too difficult to get used to – it just felt a little weird at first.

As for Gunvolt himself, well, perhaps he's the reason there's a "3" in the title. In some ways, it's still his story – he's just taking more of a backseat in it, that's all. Kirin meets him in the intro stage, where she seals away his awakened power and form. A side effect of this is that he's now in a more dog-like form, and he follows her around, granting her some of his own abilities and allowing her to perform moves such as the Arc Chain and Prevasion.

However, Gunvolt doesn't have to be sidelined for the entire game. Once they've figured out how to keep his awakened powers in check, you can switch from Kirin to Gunvolt in his human form for a limited time. This is, for lack of a better term, god mode. It's sort of like switching from X to Zero in Mega Man X3, only about 100,000 times more potent! He has no life or energy gauges (barring the fetter gauge that limits how long you can use Gunvolt in the first place), immense power in his attacks and infinite jumping ability in the air, which effectively allows him to fly.

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: INTI CREATURES RATING: E10+

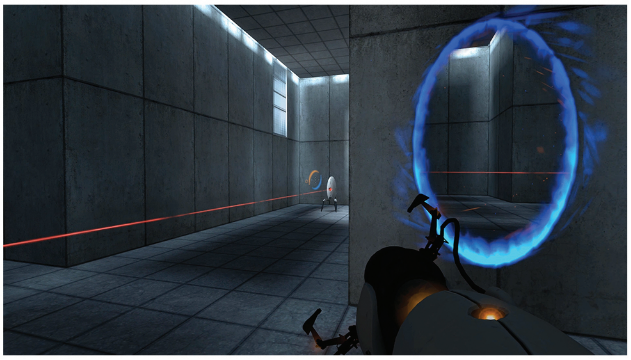
Gunvolt may not be center-stage in this adventure, but in his own way, he's still the game's superstar.

As with the other entries in the franchise, there's some Mega Man-styled inspiration going on here, as Kirin gains new abilities when taking down bosses. In addition to that, you can collect Image Pulses of previous characters seen in the series, which allows you to call upon their special abilities or enhance your own in some way, depending on the type.

While the graphics are what you've come to expect from Inti Creates and the series as a whole by this point, the sound marks another new beginning . . . well, mostly. The music features more new songs from the resident virtual idol, Lumen (or an approximation thereof), but now the series has its first English voice track! (Although sister series Gunvolt Chronicles: Luminous Avenger iX beat it to the punch with its second game a few months ago.) Kirin is voiced by Kelly Baskin, whom you may have heard as Deimos in Sailor Moon Eternal. Lumen is voiced by Diana Garnet, reprising the role from the 2017 Gunvolt OVA. And Gunvolt himself is voiced by none other than friend of Nintendo Force Sean Chiplock, also known for his work as Revali in The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild! (See our interview with him back in NF #49!)

All in all, Inti Creates has turned out another well-crafted title, albeit a divisive one. Fans of Gunvolt have been a little put-off that he's not front and center here, but otherwise, everything here works quite well. Personally speaking, I remain a bigger fan of Copen's gameplay in Chronicles, but I still enjoyed Kirin's new style. — **DAVID**

8.5



Portal Goes Portable

PORTAL COMPANION COLLECTION

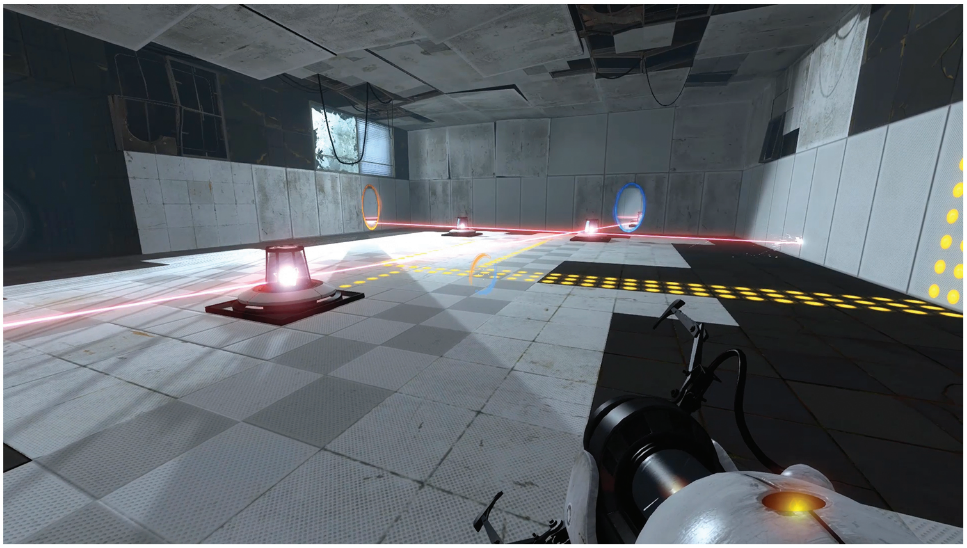
THIS WAS A triumph.

Besides a Portal-themed level in LEGO Dimensions for Wii U and the excellent spinoff Bridge Constructor: Portal on Switch, Portal and its sequel have always eluded Nintendo platforms, until now. The Portal Companion Collection is here, and at long last, Switch owners can discover for themselves why these two games easily rank among the best ever made.

Portal may look like a first-person shooter, but it's actually a first-person puzzler. You control Chell, a woman trapped in a place called Aperture Laboratories. A somewhat friendly voice named GLaDOS guides you through the facility, which was designed to test the Aperture Science Handheld Portal Device.

This fancy gun allows you to place two portals on most flat surfaces in the game: one blue and one orange. What goes in one portal comes out the other, exactly as it came in. This means that if you place a blue portal on the floor and an orange one on the wall, you'll fall out of the orange portal with the same force and trajectory as you entered the blue one. It sounds a bit complicated, and in practice it can be, but it's the kind of thing that you have to play yourself to properly wrap your head around – and once you do, you'll be thinking with Portals in no time!

This is all amplified by the game's extraordinary personality and storytelling. It's not all that complex, and I won't spoil it here, but suffice it to say GLaDOS isn't just a friendly A.I. running tests, and the way the game gets you to its incredibly memorable conclusion is one heck of a wild and effective ride. There are no cutscenes or elaborate quick-time events. Instead, you experience the story through a combination of hilarious and unnerving narrations by GLaDOS, in-game environments and your own gameplay.

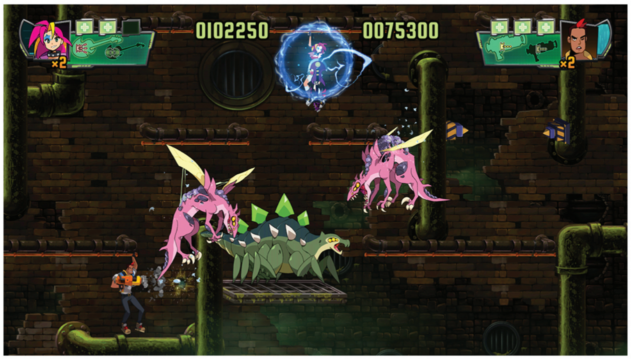


Portal 1 is a bit short, but it's strikingly brilliant. Portal 2 then picks up several years later: Chell finds herself back in an extremely dilapidated Aperture Laboratories where she meets an A.I. orb named Wheatley. He seems to want to help you escape the facility, but it isn't long before you come face-to-face with a very much still alive GLaDOS. What follows is a considerably longer game that dives into what GLaDOS actually is, where Aperture came from (with a phenomenal performance by J.K. Simmons as founder Cave Johnson), and a whole slew of fascinating new puzzles involving velocity, friction and more. There's even a separate yet equally brilliant co-op campaign.

Both of these games are nothing short of masterpieces, and they look and play excellently here. Portal 2 is especially visual striking, with some setpieces that still look breathtaking today. There are a few minor load time issues, but other than that, this port handles these games with ease, and even includes button mapping and gyro controls. The Companion Collection isn't just a pair of great games – it's an example of just how great games can be! No matter what kind of player you are, I can't recommend this collection enough. **– KRIS**

10

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: VALVE
RATING: T



Jurassic Arachnids!

SPIDERSAURS

ON PAPER, WayForward making a colorfully animated run-and-gun game about blowing up dinosaur bugs should have been an absolute home run. And Spidersaurs, in many ways, does comes close! But in the fast-paced world of Contra-style shooters, close isn't quite enough.

Spidersaurs puts you in control of either baseball bazooka wielder Adrian or punk rocker Victoria, both of whom are temps at InGest Corp. This company has created dinosaur/insect hybrids that are apparently as delicious as they are dangerous, and they've been cooking up and feeding them to the public with great success – so far. Predictably, something has now happened to cause the beasts to run amok, and it's up to you two (as the only two willing employees) to stop the threat and save the world.

Each boss you defeat awards you new abilities that increase your maneuverability in interesting ways, including a spider web that works nearly identically to the grappling hook in WayForward's own Contra 4. The monster designs are superb, the writing is cheesy and hilarious, and the new abilities you earn genuinely make it more fun to play.

Again, all this sounds like a recipe for a fantastic game – except there's one major problem: just about every weapon is a dud. None of them are fun to use. The guns in Spidersaurs either fire hilariously slowly or are so weak you constantly need to stand still and fire at the same foe for way too long while trying to dodge the onslaught of other enemies and their attacks bombarding you from every direction. It's frustrating: You want to feel real impact, but never do.

Run-and-gun games need to nail both aspects – running *and* gunning – to work. Here, the gunning constantly detracts from the running, and from there, no amount of eye-popping art direction can stop everything else from falling apart. A feeling of empowerment is really important in a game like this, and at no point, even in victory, does Spidersaurs deliver on that.

It's such a shame here, because Spidersaurs is such a cool concept, with a great personality to boot! The absurd world they've created is just the kind of ridiculous Saturday morning cartoon nonsense that people my age loved back in the day, and it's delivered with so much style that it's nigh impossible not to crack a smile while the game's completely bonkers story is being told. But in a world where so many great run-and-gun games exist, some even from WayForward themselves, the fact that this one can feel like such a chore to play is just too much to overlook.

Shout-out to the soundtrack by Harumi Fujita, a legendary composer of classics like Pulstar and Blazing Star who came out of retirement to tackle this great set of tracks!

I do hope this game performs well enough to get some sort of follow-up, because this premise seriously needs to be mined further. But for now, Spidersaurs is pretty hard to recommend, at least on a gameplay level, to anyone but the most hardcore run-and-gun enthusiasts. **– KRIS**

6.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD RATING: E10+

A Third Chance to Find Success

KLONOA PHANTASY REVERIE SERIES

IT'S A STRANGE thing, being a fan of a cult classic. You know the game is fun, but you feel like you're in on a secret – something that few other people realize is as good as it is. And when you meet someone else who enjoys it, well, that's an instant connection! But eventually you want to share that love, because if the game you love remains just a cult classic, how are you ever going to get more games like it? Such is my experience with the Klonoa series, and my vain hope for a third main entry.

I first discovered this franchise thanks to all the critical buzz around Klonoa 2. I decided to pick it up – and what I found blew me away! Not only because of what it achieved visually on the PlayStation 2 at the time, but with how it so deftly iterated upon one simple gameplay mechanic.

It didn't take long after that for me to hunt down the PS1 original and see just how special the series had always been. Unfortunately, outside of handheld entries and a Wii remake of the original, the Klonoa franchise has languished for years.

And yet, against all odds, Klonoa is back for a third try at success in the form of the Phantasy Reverie Series, a remaster of both Klonoa: Door to Phantomile and Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil. It's the best chance yet for these games to get the recognition their diehard fans feel they deserve.

That is, if they still hold up.

Door to Phantomile focuses on the titular Klonoa and his friend, Huepow, as they get wrapped up in the dark plans of a being known as Ghadius. He wishes to turn the dream world of Phantomile into a land of nightmares, corrupting the different kingdoms in his search for a mystical pendant. It's a simple, adorable setup . . . that will completely throw newcomers for a loop the more Klonoa discovers! It's part of what makes it so beloved and still helps it stand out from its platforming contemporaries.

Unfortunately, the audio quality of the voice acting varies wildly, as it pulls directly from the original PS1 sound files. It's not bad, but it does clash with the upgraded visuals.

That's a pretty minor complaint, though, as the gameplay is what really makes Klonoa so unique. He explores each level from a 2.5D perspective, making it far more dynamic than a typical 2D platformer. But Klonoa feels like it goes even beyond similar 2.5D games like Kirby 64, in that enemies approach from all sides and players must interact with background elements quite often. This is all done thanks to a special ring that can fire short-ranged Wind Bullets. If an enemy is struck by this power, it will become inflated, allowing Klonoa to throw it as a projectile. While it can be used to take out other enemies, much more often the technique is used to hit background puzzles. Most importantly, it can also be used as a double jump, which is where much of the platforming comes into play.

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: BANDAI NAMCO RATING: E10+

And that's pretty much all there is to Klonoa. It's deceptively simple, but what makes it so engaging is the way it iterates upon those basics. Some enemies have unique properties that relate to puzzle solving, but it's the platforming that stands out. Grabbing an enemy then immediately using it to double jump before grabbing the next in line to continue the chain across a wide pit is simultaneously exhilarating and stressful. Even more so when Klonoa's limited hover provides *just enough* airtime to make it across! The game itself isn't difficult, but the bosses are imaginative and the way the perspective is used is a high point.

But I still consider Klonoa 2 to be even better. This time Klonoa finds himself in the world of Lunatea, where he must stop a sky pirate from collecting four elements in an effort to revive a lost fifth kingdom that could spell disaster for the world. Like the first game, the story starts out rather simply before diving into concepts that are far headier than you'd expect from a game like this. I also find the characters to be more appealing overall, as they're given more time to be fleshed out.

What truly makes it great, though, is how it expands upon the concepts established in the original. New enemies provide new opportunities for puzzles and even platforming challenges. One provides an electric burst that sends Klonoa high into the air, making spacial awareness all the more important; another builds up energy with each new enemy it's thrown at, allowing it to destroy special barriers; yet another allows Klonoa to fly for a short time. It's a more thoughtful game than the original, and although some may prefer that simplicity, I enjoy how much it makes me have to plan and think ahead.

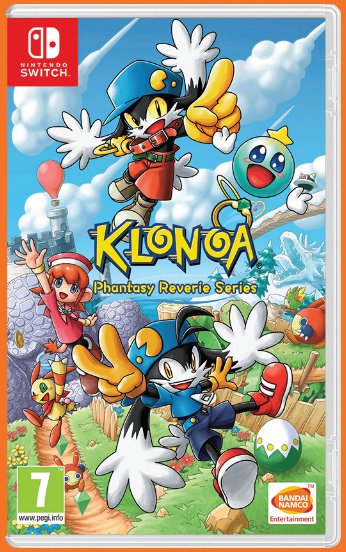
Then there's the new hoverboard levels, which serve to change up the pacing and perspective, as it shifts behind Klonoa's back for certain sections. It also highlights the sheer verticality in many of the levels, as Klonoa is launched high into the air, providing an even better look at how the levels are constructed. At times it feels like an explorable 3D space with how the paths wrap around each other and interact. However, this also means that Klonoa 2's levels tend to be longer, making revisits a bit of a chore. It also reuses a handful of levels that I still enjoyed thanks to their remixes, but it feels like an element that some players would be annoyed by. The game does feel more challenging overall, especially with the sheer amount of instant-death pits there are in the final levels. It certainly raises the stakes leading to the final encounter.

There are some commonalities between the two games, in that each stage has 150 gems and six collectables to find. Don't bother with the gems in the original Klonoa, though, as there's no reward – something that's thankfully fixed in the sequel, as collecting all the gems there will unlock special remastered artwork. Finding all the collectables in each level unlocks a truly difficult extra level in the original game, and two extra levels in the sequel. Other new features include a new Easy Mode along with the unlockable Hard Mode (where only one health and one life is provided), as well as a mode to fight the bosses once more, along with a music and movie player.

While it may be lacking in extras, Klonoa Phantasy Reverie Series is a fantastic release for longtime fans of this often unsung franchise. Simply having Klonoa 2 available on modern consoles is a joy, and seeing how the developers combined elements of the PS1 Door to Phantomile and its Wii remake to create what might be the best version is fantastic. Playing both of these games again felt nostalgic, and highlighted why they were cult classics to begin with. They may be somewhat short, but they're some of the most memorable platformers I've ever played!

With any luck, this will finally lead to Klonoa 3. Wouldn't that be a lovely dream? **– DERRICK**

8.5



TWO GAMES ON ONE CARTRIDGE

Bandai Namco decided to make Klonoa Phantasy Reverie Series an eShop exclusive in North America, but if you'd prefer to own a physical copy, those can be obtained from either Japan or Europe. Check out an import shop like Play-Asia for the Japanese version, or a site like Amazon UK to grab the European edition pictured above!

Serve Yourself a Sundae and Soar to Sydney

MARIO KART 8 DELUXE: BOOSTER COURSE PASS – WAVE 2

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, the greatest Mario Kart track of all time has returned. Waluigi Pinball is back, newly added to Mario Kart 8 Deluxe thanks to Wave 2 of the Booster Course Pass!

If you've been following the fan requests for the Course Pass since it was first announced, you've surely seen Waluigi Pinball leading plenty of wishlists. There's just something perfectly magical about it! Even beyond the magic of Waluigi alone!

The track first debuted in Mario Kart DS back in 2005. Mario Kart DS was fantastically fun all around, and being thrown into a gigantic pinball machine was the absolute highlight of that specific sequel! You're shot up into the playing field just like a pinball being hit by a plunger, then you weave your way down the table, avoiding obstacles like bumpers and flippers and, of course, big pinballs!

The grandeur of this scenario has been amplified here, especially since this is the first time Waluigi Pinball has been seen on the big screen. It even gets special sound effects when the item roulette is running!

If you couldn't tell, I'm a fan of the pinball table racetrack. But seven more fresh courses are here as well!

New York Minute and Sydney Sprint are here from Mario Kart Tour, and like Wave 1's Paris track they are both twisting tours through those real-world cities that change the route you take for every lap. I wasn't too impressed by the New York track – it doesn't feel very "New York" to me; it's more like a generic city – but Sydney Sprint surprised me with its appeal. You drive through the iconic Opera House, drift past sailboats anchored in the harbor, hop across a jagged bridge perfect for stringing jump boosts together and even see a ferris wheel before the end. And the music in Sydney is a real bop!

Mario Circuit 3 returns from the original SNES game, and I appreciate the nostalgia there, but it's a super simple track. Much more wildly altered is Kalimari Desert, returning from Mario Kart 64 – driving on the train tracks used to be a gag when playing that course decades ago, but now Lap 2 forces you to do just that while avoiding the oncoming train heading straight for you! It was an honest moment of delight when I saw that the developers had made that drastic of a change to what I'd expected would just be an HD-ified visual upgrade to the same old N64 racetrack.

The biggest visual upgrade honor has to be awarded to Snow Land, as its ice-covered roadways shine with a brilliance never before seen, even though there have previously been several other ice/snow-themed race-tracks before. Mushroom Gorge from Mario Kart Wii is also back with an agreeably grand glow-up as well.

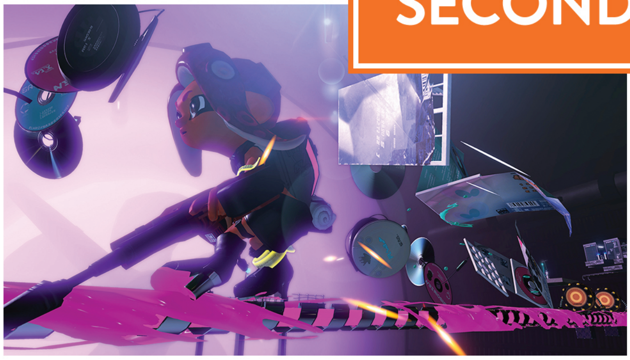
Finally, Wave 2's brand-new track is Sky-High Sundae, which actually uses the anti-gravity mode that all the other DLC tracks have ignored! It's a crazily vertical trek across an enormous assortment of ice cream treats, with few barriers to keep you on the road. Try not to slip off the side of an ice cream sandwich!

With the debut of Wave 2, Wave 1's Coconut Mall also got a patch so the stationary cars on its final stretch now move as they should. I'm happy to see Nintendo listening to feedback from the fans like that, and giving us our most-wanted: Waluigi! **— LUCAS**

9.0

DLC PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E

SECOND OPINION



Take a Free Ride on the Deepsea Metro

SPLATOON 2: OCTO EXPANSION

A SECOND OPINION four years later? Two reasons. One, because Splatoon 3 is just about to launch, so revisiting the previous game is one way to get reacquainted with the Inklings' world before diving back into it in the new sequel. And two . . . because it's free!

If you're an Expansion Pass-tier subscriber to Nintendo Switch Online, that is. In order to further boost interest in that more expensive subscription option, Nintendo added this 2018 Splatoon 2 DLC expansion to its array of "free" extras a few months ago, where it's joined the likes of the Animal Crossing Happy Home DLC and the Mario Kart Booster Pass.

To get you back up to speed, the Octo Expansion is a second story mode for Splatoon 2 that tells a subterranean tale. You play as a young Octoling who wakes up deep down in the depths of a labyrinthian subway system called the Deepsea Metro, and you're tasked with riding the rails around to different subway stations, each of which hosts some kind of platforming, puzzle-solving or ink-blasting challenge. If you can successfully clear a stage, the rails will extend a bit further on your map screen, granting access to further levels. Ultimately, you need to reach four specific subway spots to claim the four "Thangs" waiting there.

When you accomplish all that, you'll get to escape the subway and make it back to the surface world! (Or will you? This is a Splatoon story, after all, so expect a few twists and turns before all is said and done!)

I skipped playing this Octo tale back in 2018, as I'd had my fill of Splatoon at the time and a harder extra story mode was a tough sell for me personally. For free, though? The price was right for me to finally indulge my curiosity, and I was eager to check it out!

. . . I just wasn't quite prepared for how tough these challenges are. My Splatoon skills have gotten really rusty after years away from regular play, and I had a tough time here.

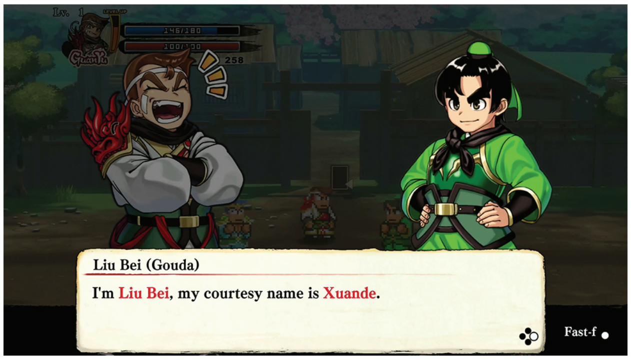
Sometimes too tough! Some of these stages seemed a bit too strict in their requirements for completion, and I failed to the point of frustration more than once. There is an option in place that lets you skip any challenge that's too difficult after you try it enough times, though, so you can keep making progress in the story at a reasonable pace even if you too haven't won any Turf Wars for the last few years.

Not having to pay anything extra to play this content really helped ease the frustrating moments, too. I'm sure I would have liked the whole thing less if I'd plunked down the full price of $19.99 to download it any earlier than this past April! If you also skipped this expansion the first time around, try it now! **— LUCAS**

7.5 JONATHAN

8.0 LUCAS

DLC PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E10+



A Back-in-Time Beat-'Em-Up

RIVER CITY SAGA: THREE KINGDOMS

OF THE NEWLY localized 8-bit games in 2020's Double Dragon & Kunio-kun: Retro Brawler Bundle, the clear standout was undoubtedly Downtown Special Kunio-kun's Historical Period Drama! What made the title so intriguing wasn't just its overhauled growth system and wider selection of skills compared to River City Ransom – more so it was the novelty of seeing our favorite high school hooligans reimagined as denizens of Japan's ancient Edo era.

River City Saga: Three Kingdoms follows in Special's temporally displaced footsteps, but changes the setting to ancient China to reenact Romance of the Three Kingdoms. Specifically, it condenses the events of the Yellow Turban Rebellion through the Battle of Red Cliffs – ending just before the titular Three Kingdoms are established, ironically – recontextualizing the historical epic as a sequence of roughshod turf wars befitting the Kunio-kun legacy.

Speaking of Kunio, our main man assumes the part of Guan Yu, the aggrandized folk hero who aids his sworn brothers Liu Bei and Zhang Fei in their efforts to restore order to the nation. Other series mainstays appear in period-appropriate roles – yakuza leader Sabu becomes the cruel warlord Dong Zhuo, the cute yet deadly Hasabe serves as the righteous general Zhang Liao and the intimidating she-hulk Misuzu slays as the invincible Lu Bu. All of the characters retain their classic 8-bit sprites, tweaked with colorful new threads and additional animation frames – there's a touch of nostalgic comfort in seeing those old pixels repurposed for a new age!

The basic framework is unchanged from the original River City Ransom, though instead of two or three street thugs at a time, entire hordes of a dozen or more will descend with ferocity. While your basic punches, kicks and throws fall short against such overwhelming numbers, after stockpiling Special and Ultimate Attacks, you'll be carving through their defenses like you're auditioning for Dynasty Warriors! And beyond even those techniques are Tactics that call upon a platoon of soldiers to rain fiery arrows, unleash devastating floods or assemble an anachronistic suit of Iron Man armor!

Yet despite these enhancements to help players savor the thrill of combat, Three Kingdoms doesn't feel as focused as past Kunio-kun entries. Part of that is the nature of the source material – one of the most dense tales ever put to paper, as scholars of East Asian literature can attest. The game's narrative is a fractal tree of alliances and betrayals, names and relations, delivered in exposition dumps that interrupt the action with alarming regularity. In all honesty, an offshoot of a series about teenagers who solve disputes with fists and feet isn't the most ideal setting to navigate the nuances of Chinese political upheaval.

The gameplay loop involves receiving marching orders from superiors or job requests from poor villagers in need, then heading to a marked location on the map to complete the task before returning to collect a reward or a follow-up assignment. It's a lot of backtracking and aimless wandering with no sense of how far you've advanced the story until the narrator chimes in to close out the Chapter. Between that and the concentrated influx of story content, you'll quickly feel as though your actions lack purpose and that your time is better spent elsewhere.

The game shouldn't have to feel like that, though! How you complete optional missions or answer dialogue prompts will either raise or tank

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ARC SYSTEM WORKS DEVELOPER: APLUS GAMES RATING: E10+

GET PHYSICAL

While an English-language cartridge release of this game isn't officially on sale in the States, you can order the "English Cover" Asian physical cartridge version through online import shops like Play-Asia. The character art is absolutely on-point for these versions of Kunio and his Nekketsu High School pals. It'd look nice on a shelf!

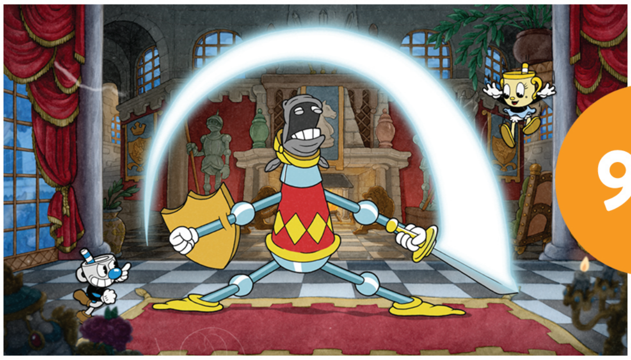
7.0

your Reputation, but it's never clear across the dozen or so hours of a single playthrough what that system actually does. It's supposed to unlock either of two additional endings per Chapter, featuring unique boss encounters and nonsensical plot twist developments. But bizarrely, Reputation only factors into higher difficulty levels, which you can only access after clearing the story at least once. That means players who bounce after the credits will never realize that their choices can in fact have meaningful consequences!

I was set to walk from Three Kingdoms and never return, but my curiosity compelled me to pursue a second run. To my surprise, Stat Point distribution, currency total and acquired techniques carry over, transforming my Guan Yu into One-Punch Man during the early Chapters – save for against the significantly more challenging alternate bosses. Featuring new armor pieces that grant various ability boosts, the threat of negative status ailments absent from the original run and the personal decision to skip cutscenes I viewed beforehand, this session was a more briskly paced journey that doled out a steadier stream of rewards.

Of course, the quickest way to crank the fun factor is with drop-in co-op. During the core campaign, a friend can command Guan Yu's follower Zhou Cang, who always mirrors Guan Yu's ability level and loadout. However, if you want to roll with a four-person squad, fire up the bonus mode China Heroes, which reduces the main game to a traditional level-by-level belt-scroller. You select among 24 base and unlockable characters who each sport their own combat styles – even the River City Girls incarnations of Kyoko and Misako are present as the Qiao sisters of Romance fame! (Just make sure your partners are local, as random players will seemingly never be online at the same time as you!)

River City Saga: Three Kingdoms leads with an incredible premise and promising gameplay tools, only to become encumbered by those very same elements. Your dreams of hot-blooded conquest in imperial China can be realized eventually, though you'll wish that experience had been available right from the beginning!
– TONY



9.5

Now with Three Heroes Instead of Just Two!

CUPHEAD: THE DELICIOUS LAST COURSE

DLC PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: STUDIO MDHR
RATING: E10+

THE MOLDENHAUER FAMILY of Studio MDHR learned a hard lesson about work-life balance during Cuphead's exhausting seven-year production cycle. As a result, they opted to delay the launch of this highly anticipated expansion from its original 2019 target to avoid crunch, then once again as a response to the COVID-19 outbreak. And good on them, since no game is worth sacrificing the health and happiness of its developers.

That said, the wait for The Delicious Last Course was not in vain!

On the not-too-distant shores of Inkwell Isle Four reside six stretchy new bosses to test Cuphead and Mugman's mettle, plus an optional seventh boss as part of a secret questline. You'll tussle with a bovine sheriff who refuses to let up even after being reduced to canned sausage, a mountain giant as tough on the inside as he is on the outside and literal dogfighters aiming to knock you off the wings of a biplane. Each encounter is a dazzling dance of mayhem with oodles of references to Golden Age short films — as tough to play as they are entertaining to watch.

Absent are the run-and-gun levels that padded the main campaign, and in their stead is a mini-boss menagerie called The King's Leap. While run-and-gun stages may have encouraged players to reach the goal without firing a shot, none of the regular bosses have alternate completion goals that demand non-aggression. Against the King's chess-themed troupe, however, your only recourse is the parry ability, recontextualizing what would otherwise be typical combat encounters as puzzle-platforming trials. It's a delightful addition that I wish had been expanded even further.

Of course, the biggest draw is the arrival of Ms. Chalice, the corporeal incarnation of the Legendary Chalice previously seen hanging out in Inkwell's Mausoleums, as a third playable character. At first blush, she seems to be more capable than her drinkware pals, boasting an extra hit point, a double jump, an invincibility roll and the ability to parry simply by dashing. But if you're already accustomed to Cuphead and Mugman's playstyle, the slight change in controls and capabilities can easily throw off your muscle memory. Her inclusion is nonetheless a boon, as tackling the new enemies and even replaying the main campaign as Ms. Chalice provides enough of a fresh challenge to make the effort worthwhile.

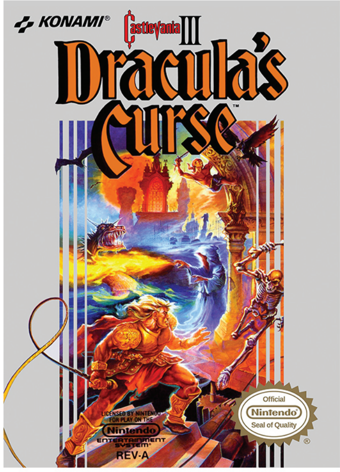
Cuphead was already a landmark in video game art and animation on top of being an expertly balanced tribute to the arcade shooters of yesteryear. Studio MDHR nailed the formula right out the gate and sought only to give fans more of what they loved in the form of a "delicious last course" to satisfy any lingering cravings. If this is truly the end of the Cuphead ride, what a high note to leave on!
— TONY

Dr. CHOZO & SAMUS-CHAN

BY THOR THORVALDSON

THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM!

The third book in a long-running series? Probably not too different from the ones that came before. The third movie in an on-going saga? Don't expect it to do anything too unexpected. The third season of a TV show? The third album from a rock 'n roll band? The third, uh, painting from a famous painter? Again, deviation from the norm is not too common. But some bit of magic seems to happen when a video game series reaches its third release. Oftentimes, a true masterpiece emerges! Not always, but with alarming regularity. Let's look back across several examples, and you can judge for yourself whether or not the third time was really the charm for each of these big brands!



CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE

THE VAMPIRE HUNTING of this classic series kicked off with the entirely linear first Castlevania, then went so far off-formula for Castlevania II that players mostly ended up just getting lost and confused. Konami fixed that frustration for this excellent third release, restoring linear levels but also giving players a choice between multiple diverging paths at several points. It was a wonderful compromise that added a ton of replay value to the adventure!

The biggest shift, though, was the arrival of three extra playable characters: Trevor Belmont's traditional whip-cracking could be complemented by the wall-crawling and knife-tossing Grant DaNasty, the magical might of spellcaster Sypha Belnades or the son of Dracula himself, Alucard, who could transform into a bat on command! Having multiple playable heroes with unique looks and their own abilities was almost unheard of at this point in video game history (back in 1990), so Dracula's Curse absolutely left its mark on the entire industry. **— LUCAS**

MEGA MAN 3

I REMEMBER PLAYING Mega Man 3 ahead of its release at PowerFest 1990 – I played an early version of the Gemini Man stage and was blown away!

While many tout the jump from the first Mega Man to Mega Man 2 as the biggest improvement in the series, I maintain that Mega Man 3 added more elements and lore and advanced the franchise further. Rush was the biggest addition, as the Jet and Marine enhancements had Mega Man flying high and diving deep. The slide added interesting level design, and Break Man was unmasked to be Proto Man, revealing that Mega Man had a mysterious brother who was problematic, but also helpful. Players even had to return to destroyed levels after defeating the eight new Robot Masters to face "Doc Robots" that became possessed by Mega Man 2's bosses. After all that, you still had to defeat Dr. Wily, who had stolen the gigantic peace-keeping robot Gamma.

There was more game to play and bigger baddies to beat, and the tunes were nothing short of masterpieces. It's still my favorite of the series! **– BRETT**

GRADIUS III

THE SUPER NES handled its competition well back in the day, but if there was one genre the console struggled with, it was shoot-'em-ups. Sure, the system eventually got its share of excellent efforts like U.N. Squadron, but Konami's Gradius III was there at launch, and the results were mixed.

Gradius III was a pretty demanding game, and the combination of Konami's track record for producing high-quality arcade ports and screenshots of the game looking positively breathtaking generated serious hype. It delivered in a lot of ways too, especially considering the U.S. didn't get Gradius II at all, so features like the weapon select seemed fresh. Unfortunately, Konami's ambition outpaced their ability on this one, because Gradius III is marred by almost constant, brutal slowdown.

At this point in its life, the SNES couldn't keep up with the amount of action happening on-screen, which had already been pared down from its arcade counterpart. The SNES version is still generally considered to be superior since it irons out a few of the arcade game's issues – like a lack of continues and truly controller-shattering difficulty – but the nearly game-breaking slowdown is hard to overlook. Fortunately, a fan-made ROM hack was recently created that uses the SNES SA-1 chip to make the game run buttery smooth, even on original hardware! So with the right tools, the definitive version of Gradius III is still only on the Super NES. **– KRIS**

CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

WORLD-BUILDING AND lore can be fun, but sometimes you just want to run wild as you race toward your goal! Contra III has you covered there: Alien hordes are attacking Earth, you're a commando armed with a gun that shoots enormous alien-destroying orbs and your mission is simply to attack aggressively.

There's never a dull moment in this title. Aliens are constantly rushing at you, firing missiles in all directions, setting things on fire or otherwise trying to explode you before you can explode them. And what are some of those bosses? A zombie turtle with brains for legs? A crab made of morning-stars? A gargantuan mecha-skeleton!? Thankfully you have the tools for the job, in the form of two radical futuristic guns that can fire anything from scorching flames to devastating laser beams.

Contra III had several new additions that really made it stand out from its predecessors. Now you could pick two upgrades at a time and freely switch between them, letting you dish out your choice of punishment. The game also had levels with a top-down view, rendered in gloriously pixelated Mode 7, a console first for the series!

This game is notoriously difficult and the hardest mode even adds new hazards and speed to your many enemy encounters. But if you can overcome the challenge, you get a special ending. It's well worth the frustration! **– LINDSEY**

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

EARLY ADOPTERS OF the SNES scored a poster promoting upcoming titles alongside their 16-bit hardware, and the most eye-catching screenshots printed upon it came from a game called, at the time, "Zelda III." Less than a year later, this highly sought-after sequel arrived in America with its new name: The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past. An appropriately grand title for one of Nintendo's biggest and best adventures ever!

Perhaps dropping the Roman numeral was meant to help distance this game from its predecessor, Zelda II: The Adventure of Link. But its gameplay did that well enough right from the start, as Zelda II's 2D side-scrolling perspective was swept out of the series in favor of a return to the original game's birds-eye view. And what a leap to go from Zelda 1's top-down exploration to this! Link's movements were so much more fluid; his animations were so much more complete. It's hard to understand just how drastic a jump in quality the transition from the NES to the SNES was unless you lived through it! My jaw stayed dropped to the floor for about three years straight.

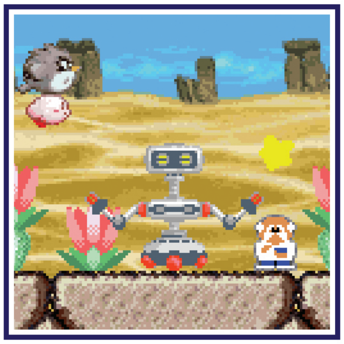
Beyond being visually striking, A Link to the Past solidified the Zelda series and gave its sequels a perfect template to follow in the future. Please go play this one if you never have before! **— LUCAS**

KIRBY'S DREAM LAND 3

BOASTING A HUGE graphical leap up from its Game Boy roots, Kirby's Dream Land 3 featured bright and colorful crayon-like drawings of Kirby and his friends as they traveled across Popstar to defeat Dark Matter. It also marked an end of an era for Nintendo, as it was the final first-party SNES game released in North America back in 1997!

Along with Gooey — a blob of black matter with a long tongue who could be controlled either by A.I. or a second player — Kirby was able to combine Copy Abilities with the abilities of his animal friends, now numbering six. Along with Rick the Hamster, Coo the Owl and Kine the Fish returning from Kirby's Dream Land 2, there was Pitch the Bird, ChuChu the Octopus and Nago the Cat. There were also cameos from Samus Aran (in a level where you needed to defeat Metroids) and a level where you collected the parts to build R.O.B.!

This was one of my favorite Super Nintendo games growing up, and getting 100% completion — including some pretty difficult minigame challenges, like a boss rush — was a huge accomplishment. While Kirby's platforming and puzzling action has remained iconic since the early days, we haven't seen many returning elements of Kirby's Dream Land 3, except for Gooey, who joined Rick, Kine and Coo as an ally in Kirby Star Allies. (Nago, Pitch and ChuChu made small cameos too.) **— REBECCA**



WARIO LAND 3

THERE WASN'T A huge jump in features from the previous two games in this series, but Wario Land 3 managed to keep the franchise's charm while adding extra fun.

The plot was less interesting than the usual spat with Captain Syrup, as Wario gets sucked into a music box he finds in a cave. He gets tricked into releasing a horrible clown demon named Rudy that he must then defeat to escape the box!

Most of Wario's "reactions" return from Wario Land II, like Fat Wario, Puffy Wario, Hot Wario, Zombie Wario and more. These "power-ups" are inflicted upon our anti-hero from interacting with certain objects or enemies, and while most look painful, the transformations help Wario reach new areas. New reactions include Vampire Wario, Snowman Wario and Electric Wario.

There are also nine new more traditional power-ups to try out, like the Lead Overalls, High Jump Boots, Head Smash Helmet and even Swimming Flippers. In this adventure, Wario has a plethora of ways to explore the multitude of nooks and crannies to hunt for his treasures. Yes, he has to escape the box, but his greed still has to shine through to make it a Wario game, and there are 100 treasures to collect to prove it.

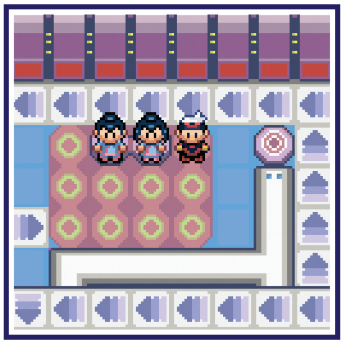
While not entirely memorable, Wario Land 3 was still a fun outing. **— BRETT**

POKÉMON RUBY & SAPPHIRE

WITH EACH POKÉMON generation, new elements are introduced to the gameplay formula. Some come and go . . . others shape the franchise for years to come!

While every gen has played a role in this, Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire's Generation III is one of the most important if you ask me, thanks to what it added to the series. This pair of games launched on the Game Boy Advance in 2003 and featured the new and vibrant Hoenn Region for players to explore. They changed up the battle system with double battles, where you could go 2v2 with opponents, and also added Pokémon Contests, where you could show off your Pokémon in a stage performance setting.

Most importantly, Gen III put a spotlight on how Pokémon affected the world around them both in the past and present, which is a theme we've seen in several games since then. The Ruby & Sapphire plot revolved around villainous factions Team Magma and Team Aqua seeking the ancient Pokémon Groudon and Kyogre to alter the Hoenn region's environment. Gen III was the first game to venture beyond Team Rocket and the first to really dig deeper into Pokémon lore, and the games that have come after are all the better for it! **— MAGGIE**



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 3

THE GAME BOY ADVANCE was home to a ton of SNES ports. Some were mostly unaltered, while others, like the Donkey Kong Country trilogy, tried to improve on their source material! The first two games got somewhat ambitious ports, but they pulled out all the stops for Donkey Kong Country 3, which ultimately became a wildly different experience than it was on SNES.

In addition to a handful of new stages and challenges, the entire overworld map was redrawn, as were many indoor environments like Funky's boat rental shop, and The Brothers Bear even got completely new (and improved) character models. But that's not all! Strangely enough, for this port, Rare commissioned David Wise, lead composer of the first two DKC titles, to completely rewrite and replace DKC3's SNES version's music by Eveline Fischer. Why? Who knows! Stranger still is the addition of an entire minigame section that is quite literally a reskin of an NES boat action game called Cobra Triangle. That makes some sense because that game was also by Rare and boats were already a part of the game, but it's still pretty random.

Regardless, Donkey Kong Country 3 may not be revered as much as its SNES counterparts, but on GBA, it's top banana. **— KRIS**

FINAL FANTASY III

EVERYONE KNOWS THAT Final Fantasy VI was renumbered as Final Fantasy III when it was first released in the West, but what about the *real* Final Fantasy III? Released in 1990 on the Famicom, Final Fantasy III introduced the Jobs system to the franchise, and it has remained an integral part ever since.

Four orphaned children, the Onion Knights, are bestowed with different equippable Jobs when they encounter a crystal while exploring a cave, which implores them to save the balance of the world. Jobs range from the traditional character classes – Fighter, Black Mage and White Mage – to classes with specific character actions, such as the Dragoon, Geomancer and Thief. Many of these skills would be defining traits for characters in later games, such as Kain in FFIV, Locke in FFVI and Vivi in FFIX, and the Jobs system itself would see several variations, like Materia in FFVII and Dresspheres in FFX-2. It's even in other Square Enix-developed titles, such as Octopath Traveler and Bravely Default!

The West never got to see the original FFIII until 2006, when Square Enix released a well-received 3D remake on the DS, which turned the Onion Knights into fleshed-out characters: the leader Luneth, timid Arc, rebellious Refia and Ingus, a royal soldier. Unfortunately, the recent Pixel Remake still hasn't made it to Switch! **— REBECCA**

METROID PRIME 3: CORRUPTION

UNFORTUNATELY STILL THE newest mainline Prime game (since we've now been waiting for Prime 4 for over five years), this Wii adventure of Samus Aran tapped into everything that set that console apart: so, motion controls. It was honestly a brilliant shift for this series, as the Wii Remote was able to make aiming Samus' arm cannon feel much more fluid than analog stick aiming had ever been on a GameCube pad. So much so that Nintendo then had Retro Studios port the previous two Primes to Wii to take advantage of the control upgrade too!

Metroid Prime 3: Corruption also added depth to the series' lore with new supporting characters, a story in which Samus had to fight back against poison that threatened to kill her (while also powering her up) and some seriously cool battles against enemies like the iconic Dark Samus. It was a stunning game – so it's no wonder why we've wanted to have a new sequel to it for more than 15 years now! (Hurry up, Prime 4!) **– LUCAS**

MASS EFFECT 3

FEATURING SOME OF the highest highs and lowest lows of BioWare's epic sci-fi RPG series, Mass Effect 3 includes the best iterations of the trilogy's visuals, third-person shooter combat and story beats.

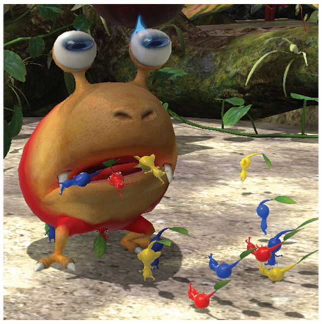
As the conclusion of Commander Shepard's story, the choices players made in previous games came full circle in Mass Effect 3, leading to some truly satisfying and heart-wrenching moments. (Seashells, anyone? If you know, you know.)

Unfortunately, Mass Effect 3 also proved how tough it can be to execute a successful conclusion. When it launched in March 2012, players harshly criticized its ending, citing plot holes and a lack of closure. Fans even petitioned BioWare! The backlash led to the developers releasing the Extended Cut DLC in June 2012 to enhance the ending with additional scenes and context. The Extended Cut was patched into later releases of the game: the Wii U version in November 2012 and 2021's Mass Effect Legendary Edition. But the original ending and its controversy is still discussed more than a decade after its release! **– MAGGIE**

PIKMIN 3

IF YOU'RE REALLY digging the "3" theme we've got going on here, you'd love playing Pikmin 3 – it embraced its numeral and spun it straight into the core gameplay by increasing the number of playable captains to three! Pikmin 1 had been a solo quest for survival starring Captain Olimar, and Pikmin 2 had explored the partnership between Olimar and his nutty coworker Louie. But Pikmin 3 introduced a new trio of teammates – Alph, Brittany and Charlie – and gave each one of them an equal share in the success (or failure) of their mission to find food on the Pikmin planet.

I've praised it before and I'll praise it again, but I love the three-way multitasking in this game. You keep direct control of one captain at all times, but can swap to the others any time, and can also issue orders to them to follow automatically. My Dad has specialized in "process efficiency" for years as a professional engineer, and that's a lot of what Pikmin 3 calls for: Speedruns of this game are all about getting jobs done as expediently as possible. If that sounds good to you, try it on Wii U or Switch! **– LUCAS**



THE WITCHER III: WILD HUNT

GERALT OF RIVIA has been tracking down beasts and venturing into the wilderness since the 1990s in a long-running book series by Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski – but the white-haired hero didn't become a video game icon until The Witcher III: Wild Hunt hit the scene in 2015. This open-world RPG is one of the most celebrated and critically acclaimed games of the past decade.

And its popularity exploded further with The Witcher series on Netflix and – most importantly to us Nintendo fans – a Switch release of the third game in 2019. Developer Saber Interactive handled the port, which Eurogamer described as "a stunning technical showcase" for the system.

The Witcher III may sound familiar to Zelda fans: The game offers a detailed fantasy world that can be explored on foot or by horseback. And it's an adventure worth taking! **– EVAN**

LUIGI'S MANSION 3

LUIGI WAS SURPRISINGLY called upon to launch the GameCube hardware with his first Mansion adventure, but it was a quest that did showcase the technical advancements of the new system quite well. Years later, its sequel Dark Moon similarly showed off what the 3DS and its stereoscopic screen could really do.

But Luigi's Mansion 3 blew both of its predecessors away by being such a stunner on the Switch that its style and visuals still haven't been matched three years later! This game is truly gorgeous, and honestly feels like playing a cartoon that's come to life as scripted scenes flow right into and out of controlled gameplay with a true degree of fluidity.

And speaking of fluid, this game gave us the living goop clone, Gooigi! Hilarious on his own, but also expertly mixed into the gameplay for single-player puzzle solving and two-player co-op, too! **– LUCAS**

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

CRIMES!

Some people want the freedom to do them, preferably in a virtual way where no one gets hurt (or goes to jail). GTA III capitalized on that desire in a big way, using a massive (at the time) 3D open world to blow minds, expectations and various other things right through the roof. Its success proved that the video game medium wasn't just for kids anymore, and that many players were ready to discard traditional game design elements like distinct levels and boss fights in favor of a more "gritty realistic" approach. Thankfully, the big open-world games of today like Minecraft and Breath of the Wild give us the best of both sides of that equation, marrying the structureless freedom of GTA III with fantastic forays into video game logic. GTA III is also finally available on Nintendo hardware as of earlier this year! **– JONATHAN**

TOP TEN
THREES WE STILL WANT TO SEE

Is there anything worse than a great video game series that gives us two wonderful installments, but then never goes any further than that? It's heartbreaking to see a promising series stop at just "2" and never carry on beyond. Of course, there's no time limit when it comes to video game development – some series lie dormant for decades before suddenly being revived. Here, then, is our wishlist of "3s" for several sleeping franchises that we hope will one day be awoken!

WILL BARRETT EVER RIDE AGAIN?
MEGA MAN LEGENDS 3

WHAT'S THE ONE thing worse than a cliffhanger? A cliffhanger that's never resolved! That's what Mega Man fans, particularly those of the Mega Man Legends series, have had to endure since 2000, when (spoiler for a 22-year-old game) our hero, MegaMan Volnutt, was left stranded in space. While he's there, an ancient system is poised to reactivate and spell disaster for the people living on Terra, the flooded far-future Earth.

We came *so close* to receiving the eagerly anticipated sequel, too! Announced in 2010, only a mere decade after the last entry. It was planned for the Nintendo 3DS, with a demo that would determine interest in the project poised to kick off the Nintendo eShop. However, the eShop launch came and went with no sign of the demo! The demo would eventually go on to be cancelled alongside the full game itself, with no one outside of Capcom besides Nintendo Power editor Chris Hoffman ever getting to lay hands on it, even though it was said it was "practically ready to be released."

The development of Mega Man Legends 3 was to feature heavy fan involvement, utilizing a "Devroom" that would allow fans to collaborate with the developers directly, voting on things like the appearance of MegaMan himself and other characters, designing bosses and more.

Mega Man Legends 3's cancellation effectively kicked off a dark age for fans of the Blue Bomber, and while things have gotten better in recent years, its shadow still looms large. **— DAVID**

COULD MARIO BLAST OFF AGAIN?
SUPER MARIO GALAXY 3

I WAS SHOCKED by the announcement of Super Mario Galaxy 2. It was at E3 2009, less than two years after the launch of the first Galaxy game, and like most Nintendo fans I figured that the first Galaxy game would be all Wii would get, 3D Mario-wise. After all, the Nintendo 64 had only one 3D Mario adventure in Super Mario 64. Then the GameCube had just Super Mario Sunshine. Nintendo had settled into a rhythm of one per hardware generation . . . then blew us all away by breaking that streak!

Super Mario Galaxy 2 came to be, reportedly, because the developers had so many creative ideas left over after Galaxy 1 wrapped up that they just felt compelled to continue. Today, that same kind of situation might result in a game getting an extra DLC campaign or Expansion Pass later on, but in the pre-DLC Wii days, it meant making a standalone sequel.

Both Galaxy 1 and 2 were so great that fans have been calling out for this series to become a trilogy for over a decade now! The wild gravity-focused platforming gameplay remains truly unique, and Rosalina's star has only risen higher in the last 12 years too. The time could be right for Nintendo to send Mario sailing through outer space once again!

. . . Maybe after they relaunch Galaxy 2 on Switch, of course. Galaxy 1 got ported as part of Super Mario 3D All-Stars in 2020, but Galaxy 2 was left out of that release. Bring it back, Big N! Then bring on #3! **— LUCAS**

TIME TO RESTRING YOUR YO-YO
STARTROPICS 3

ONE OF NINTENDO'S most overlooked and underserved series is StarTropics. In fact, we have to wonder how many people at Nintendo are even aware this series exists, as it's never been released in Japan!

Regardless, this charming series, which shows flashes of inspiration from the likes of RPGs such as Dragon Quest and, perhaps more overtly, Nintendo's own Zelda franchise, saw its last entry in 1994 with Zoda's Revenge: StarTropics II on the NES, a good three years into the lifespan of the Super NES. Virtual Console releases and the like aside, suffice it to say, it's been a while.

While the series was produced and directed by Genyo Takeda and Nintendo R&D3, as the series was created with more of a Western focus, it might be nice to see one of the Western studios Nintendo has acquired over the years take a crack at it.

With almost 30 years since the last entry, there are a number of ways a new entry could be approached. 3D gaming has become a big thing in the intervening years, effectively dominating the industry today. Could you imagine a new entry that carries the vibe of 3D Zeldas within it? Heck, Wind Waker could be a good template!

On the other hand, Nintendo has been doing wonderful things in the top-down space with newer Zeldas. I'd be happy with that too! **— DAVID**

PUT THE PUZZLE PIECES ALL TOGETHER . . .

BANJO-THREEIE

YOUNG GAMERS WHO missed the Nintendo 64 era may not fully grasp older players' obsession with Banjo-Kazooie. See, though Mario's genre-defining platformers have long set benchmarks that his contemporaries could never reach, there was one fateful moment in 1997 when studio Rare's bear and bird beat the capped crusader at his own game. Then the duo ate Super Mario 64's lunch a second time in the expansive sequel Banjo-Tooie a mere two years later. Would they be able to score a hat trick on the upcoming GameCube?

Such dreams were dashed after Microsoft acquired Rare in 2002. When a new B-K did arrive on Xbox 360 – sporting the subtitle Nuts & Bolts – it took the form of a vehicle construction simulator with only thin slivers of the platforming goodness fans desired. Series director Gregg Mayles has repeatedly stated that this pivot was entirely Rare's decision, yet the truth remained that the British studio's output was no longer as strong as it was during the Nintendo partnership.

Glowing reactions to Banjo and Kazooie's induction into Smash, and to ports of their classic titles via Rare Replay and Nintendo Switch Online, prove that love for the pair still burns brightly. So while a lot of the talent from the 64-bit years has since left Rare, nothing is stopping Microsoft from contracting an outside party – as was done for the recent Killer Instinct and Battletoads revivals – to finally fulfill the Banjo-Threeie prophecy! **– TONY**

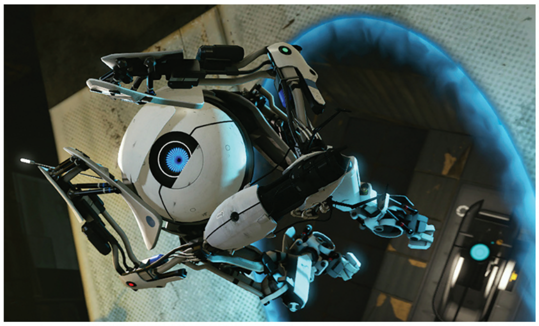
RETURN OF THE WHITE WOLF?

OKAMI 3

OKAMI IS OFTEN considered the best Zelda game that isn't actually a Zelda game. It originally hit the PlayStation 2 with lots of critical acclaim, but it never really set the sales charts on fire with that debut. It got another chance with a Wii port – which seemed like a remarkable fit thanks to the Wii Remote working so well as a surrogate for the game's Celestial Brush – but again, Okami failed to reach the mainstream success fans felt it deserved.

Still, Capcom saw fit to create a second Okami game for the DS called Okamiden. While not a true Okami 2, it's still a second game in the series, and proof positive that there's enough left to be explored to warrant a third.

Okami is largely defined by its stunning art direction, and while the first game has been remastered in HD, it doesn't quite deliver on the promise of what the world of Okami could look like with the power of modern consoles behind it. The thought of this world of watercolors coming alive in ways the Wii was never capable of is beyond exciting – as is the prospect of having the folks at Capcom find new ways to properly refine the gameplay to make it more accessible and immediately fun for a more mainstream audience. It wouldn't take much, because Okami's art, story and gameplay are already such great core concepts, but a little modern touch-up would go a long way in making it the success fans always wished it could be. **– KRIS**



TIME FOR MORE TEST CHAMBERS?

PORTAL 3

THE ENDING OF Portal 2 did a pretty good job of wrapping up the story, but included in that ending was the potential for a third game to provide something incredibly exciting: Portals in space!

While Portal 2 introduced things like various gels that increase your speed or make you bounce around, the prospect of solving Portal puzzles that involve messing with gravity is incredibly exciting. There's a taste of this in Portal 2 in some very controlled environments, but proper zero gravity areas? Sign me up!

Of course, there's also the narrative to consider. At the end of Portal 2, Wheatley was stranded in space while GLaDOS regained control of the Aperture Test Facility. There are any number of reasons Chell could find herself in captivity again – facing down threats from both GLaDOS and Wheatley – but what makes the prospect of a Portal 3 most exciting is what we don't know.

Portal was a nearly perfect game, and it was honestly hard to imagine how they'd manage to follow it up, but Portal 2 turned out arguably even better than the first game, which was no small accomplishment. What new inventions could be incorporated to make testing even more dangerous and fun? What new memorable characters could be invented to take the story in unexpected directions? Could it somehow tie into a potential Half-Life 3? I don't know, but I'd sure like to find out! It's been a long enough wait. Let's see Portal become a trilogy! **– KRIS**

GRAB A NEW PAIR OF SKATES

JET SET RADIO 3

ROLLERBLADING. POP-PUNK. GRAFFITI. This troublemaking trifecta of topics isn't exactly hot anymore, but that hasn't stopped Jet Set Radio from maintaining a dedicated fan base for over 20 years. Rumors of a third game in the series have run rampant for nearly as long, while spiritual sequels like Hover, Umurangi Generation and Bomb Rush Cyberpunk work to fill the boombox-shaped hole in our hearts. Pulling off sick tricks and spraying down the city streets with a rowdy gang of diverse ragamuffins never really gets old.

So why are we waiting for more? According to a 2020 USGamer interview, Jet Set Radio lead designer Kazuki Hosokawa feels that "if someone were to create a new 'Jet,' it's going to have to be young daredevils" making it, because at his age he "wouldn't be able to convey that passion in this title that could have only been born through all the struggles I faced [as a young person]."

It's a fascinating, self-aware insight. And we've heard similar things about the team that created Splatoon – it makes sense that both games came from industry newcomers whose contagious desire for fluid speed, risk-taking and free-spirited artistry was literally dripping from their work. I'm 100% certain that fans of those funky squid kids would fall in love with the super brothers of the Jet Set Radio franchise. Now we just need a J3T S3T Radio 3 (or J3T S3T Streaming Audio 3?) to make that concept of love a reality. **– JONATHAN**

RESHUFFLING MONOLITH SOFT
BATEN KAITOS 3

AFTER GIVING US Xenoblade Chronicles 1, 2, 3, X, Torna ~ The Golden Country and Future Connected — and with XC3's expansion story still on the horizon — I think it's safe to say that Monolith Soft has done enough with that particular franchise for a while. So before they carry forth with Xenoblade Chronicles 4 or X2 or a Shulk's Summer Swimwear Shop spinoff, maybe they can give the Xenoblade brand a break for a bit?

Back in the GameCube era, the same team of developers had another epic RPG franchise that got just two installments before going dark: Baten Kaitos. I'd love for Monolith to revisit it, and not just because doing so would let Xenoblade rest! It was an inventive series built on a foundation of card-based battles. You assembled a deck of "Magnus" cards, each one containing the captured essence of weapons, magic spells or even just everyday household items. You'd shuffle through and summon the power of these contained objects, kinda/sorta like letting a Pokémon loose from a Poké Ball.

While some of the "3s" on this list are longshots, there's reason to believe Baten Kaitos 3 is at least in consideration. Monolith staff have publicly stated their desire to return to the series, it had two Spirits in Super Smash Bros. Ultimate (so Nintendo hasn't forgotten it entirely), its trademarks were recently renewed and one ambitious Nintendo shareholder specifically asked for a new sequel for both this series and F-Zero during an investor meeting a few months ago. So, maybe? **— LUCAS**

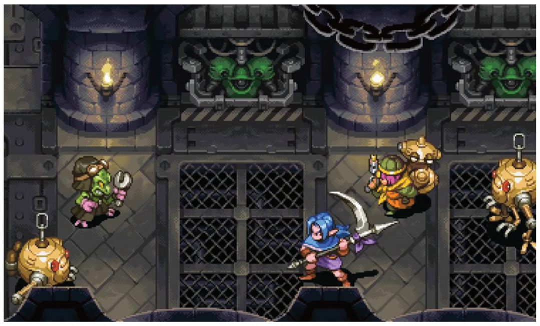
IS THERE ANY HOPE LEFT?
MOTHER 3

THOUGH IT SADDENS me to keep revisiting this topic, I can't bring myself to publish an NF issue with "3" as its theme and not mention again the biggest one that got away: Mother 3.

For anyone who still hasn't heard the story, Mother 3 is the official third game in the Mother series, which is also known in the West as the EarthBound series. But it's never officially been released outside Japan! Mother 2 came to the States as EarthBound in the '90s, and Mother 1 finally got its official English release as EarthBound Beginnings on the Wii U back in 2015. Both of those games are now also available to play on the Switch for NSO subscribers.

. . . But Mother 3 is still missing in action! It wasn't localized in the Game Boy Advance era, when it first debuted in Japan. The rumors that swirled so strongly that we put it on the cover of NF #21 in 2016 also never panned out! In his recent book, Reggie Fils-Aimé confirmed that it was considered for release at one point during his tenure, but when Mr. Iwata passed away, it seems like that opportunity evaporated.

So, will it ever happen? It seems severely unlikely at this point. What would really need to happen first is any kind of new development in the Mother/EarthBound series as a whole, beyond just merch releases and digital relaunches of the first two titles again and again. Perhaps if the franchise ever gets reignited with a modern remake like the one recently imagined by fans (see NF #58), we could start to hope again. **— LUCAS**



ENTERING A NEW DIMENSION
CHRONO BREAK

@SNAKEPIXEL KILLS ME.

That's the Twitter account of Simon S. Andersen, the pixel artist best known for his work on Owlboy. He regularly crafts fan art for his favorite series, and it kills me since it's always *so incredibly good*, but it's unofficial, so real games in those series will never look that great! Arrgh!

His biggest serving of bittersweetness came four years ago, when he spent two months putting together an entire fake announcement trailer for my most wanted "3" game ever: Chrono Trigger 3, also known as Chrono Break. One frame of it appears above, but if you really want to have your heart broken, seek out the full video on YouTube.

Why we've never gotten Chrono Break, I'll never know. That name was trademarked by Square Enix decades ago, heavily hinting that another installment in the saga that began with Chrono Trigger and continued with Chrono Cross was in the works. Chrono Trigger is still universally praised as a masterpiece now 27 years after its release on the SNES, and Cross, while not reaching the absolute pinnacle of excellence like its predecessor did, nonetheless was a fantastic game that still managed to stand out even in the RPG-heavy PS1 era. It's nearly maddening that the Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest brands have grown to include dozens upon dozens of sequels and spinoffs, while Chrono's still locked at two.

Maybe Chrono Break will appear someday in a hoped-for future. Until then, I'll just continue to torture myself with Simon's video. **— LUCAS**

Those are just 10 of our picks for the "3s" we'd still like to see. I'm sure you have a few of your own in mind! Believing that all of them will be made real in the future would be foolish, but here's hoping at least a few really do materialize to bring some dreams to life!

REST O

the sitcom starring a final boss and an obnoxious '90s video game mascot

by LLK

BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

SPLATOON 3

Three-way Tricolor Turf Wars are about to be unleashed!

DO YOU SPLAT?

While the Splatoon series has tons of active players already, it's also understandable if you aren't one of them yet. After all, the series got its start on the Wii U, a system that didn't have much reach. And then Splatoon 2 launched on the Switch mere months after that system hit store shelves — so only the earliest adopters got to be there on Day 1 for it. Nintendo seems to understand there are millions of more recent Switch owners out there who aren't yet familiar with this world of kids and squids, so Splatoon 3 is being largely marketed as a fresh starting point for newcomers.

Let's do the same here! If you're a Splatoon series newbie, allow me to offer you an overall introduction to what this franchise is all about.

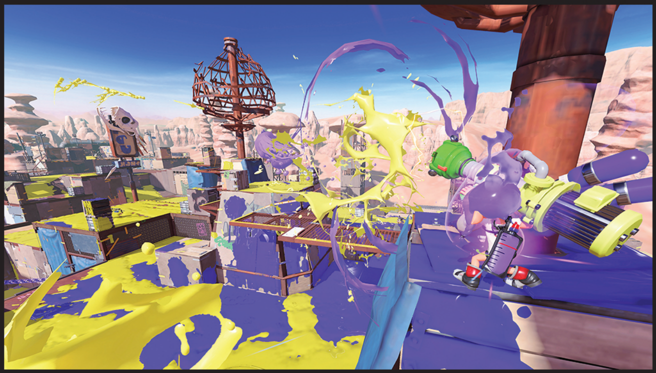
SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 9, 2022 RATING: E10+

INKING YOUR TERRITORY

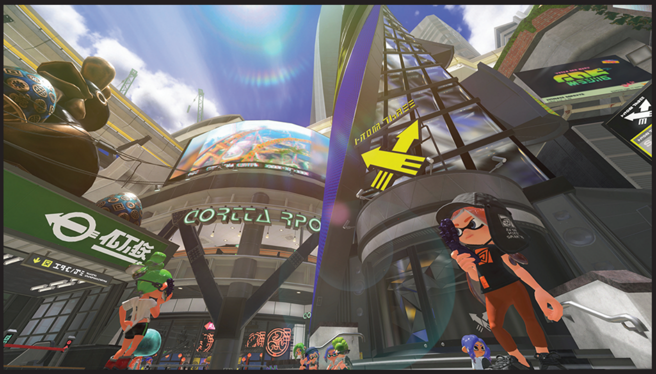
There are three main ways to play a Splatoon game: adventuring alone, cooperating with others against A.I. enemies or teaming up with three allies to form a team of four that faces off against another human-controlled squid squad. That last one is the core of the series: 4v4 Turf Wars, where the goal is to spread more of your team's color of ink on the ground than your opponents, in just three minutes.

Turf Wars are fast, fun and frantic multiplayer matches. You play as a kid wielding some kind of ink-shooting weapon, like a squirt gun, a paint roller or even just a literal bucket. You splash your ink everywhere you can while battling against your enemies, all fighting to claim the same turf as you. Once some of your ink is sloshed around, you can then transform into a small swimming squid and hide inside it! Swimming in ink lets you move faster and sneak up on opponents too.

Every battle is brilliant. And the strategies are so diverse! Do you focus on inking the ground, or do you turn your attention to attacking the enemy? Do you charge toward the center of the stage, or flank from the fringes? It takes practice and patience, but with both you'll be on the winning side.



Winning a standard Turf War is as simple as inking more turf than the other team, but there are also other game modes. Splat Zones has marked rectangles in each level that must be fought over specifically. Tower Control has a moving tower that must be claimed by one team, then defended as it rolls into enemy territory. Clam Blitz is a sporty mode in which you pick up scattered clams around the stage and must carry them to a goal on the enemy end, and Rainmaker is centered on one superpowered gun that similarly must make its way safely to a goal on the opponents' side.



GOING TO WORK

All of those multiplayer modes I just mentioned fall in together under the "player vs. player" umbrella, but if you want to only work with fellow humans and not against them, consider taking a shift for Mr. Grizz and doing some Salmon Runs!

Salmon Run is a PvE (players vs. environment) mode in which you team up with three others to fight against three waves of A.I.-controlled enemies called Salmonids. These disgusting, mud-slinging fish beasts slink their way up out of the ocean in huge quantities to attack you and your allies, and you have to hold them off together while waiting for a big Boss Salmonid to appear. When it does, you then must defeat it so it drops Golden Eggs – and then you have to carry those Golden Eggs back to a basket. Claim enough Eggs before time runs out and you get to continue to the next, harder wave – fail to do so, and your Salmon Run ends early.

While it can be a lot of fun to play, I wouldn't recommend that newcomers try Salmon Run first – it's incredibly tense, and you should really get your feet wet in other modes before trying your luck as a Runner.

FLYING SOLO

Finally, I mentioned adventuring alone was another option. Let me tell you all about the single-player story mode!

You might have already read my thoughts on the Splatoon 2 Octo Expansion back on Page 25, and if so a lot of what was said there will apply here as well. Splatoon's single-player modes are filled with stages that each challenge you to learn and master some aspect of the series' gameplay, like swiftly swimming through ink to avoid obstacles, directly battling against enemies or zeroing in on precise targets while wielding a whole variety of different weapons. It's absolutely the best place to start for new players, as clearing just a few of the single-player stages will give you a firm grasp on how to handle the controls. It's really a classic Nintendo tutorial disguised by layering a narrative on top of it all!

Splatoon 3's story has been named "Return of the Mammalians" and it will apparently serve as a kind of conclusion to the overall tale that began back on the Wii U. What could that mean? Your guess is as good as mine! I suppose it's only appropriate, since the first protagonist in Splatoon was an Inkling named Agent 3. Splatoon 3 is, therefore, a perfect place for that Agent's story to come full circle!

You won't be entirely alone as you tackle the single-player missions, though, as you'll have a tag-along pal named Smallfry: a tiny Salmonid. And let me tell you, plenty of cautious fans are giving Smallfry the side-eye in advance of the game's launch. Will he remain a loyal ally, or will he double-cross our heroes at some point, for the glory of the Salmonid race?

But Salmonids might be the least of our worries even then! Who exactly are the Mammalians anyway? Are they really from outer space, coming back to take over the planet? And how does DJ Octavio factor into all of this?

I'm excited to find out all of those answers soon. I might even hold myself back from jumping straight into the new Turf Wars in order to start the story right away!

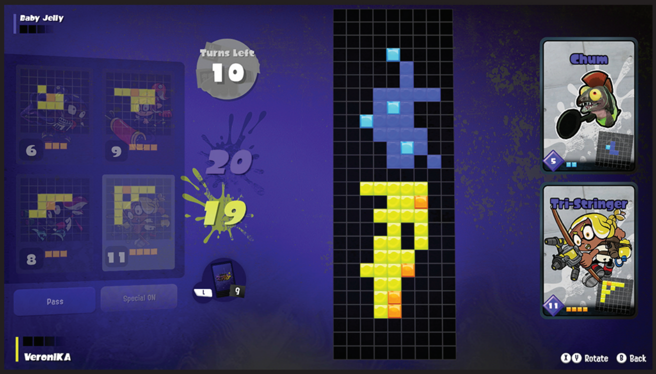
GETTING THE RIGHT FIT

OK, so now you've got an overview of the whole shebang here. With the solo story mode, the Salmon Run co-op mode and all of the many varieties of Turf War multiplayer, Splatoon 3 is like three different games in one. At least!

But there's still the connective tissue to talk about. Tying all these disparate parts together is one central setting: Splatsville. This new city is not the Inkopolis we've seen in the series before, but it serves the same purpose of being the hub for Inkling life and culture. (When they're not busy splatting each other, that is.)

Splatsville is home to a variety of different shops where you can buy new items to customize your character – weapons, headgear, clothing and shoes specifically. Every piece you add to your outfit also enhances your battling ability in some way, such as boosting your running speed or making your movements undetectable in ink. You have to weigh the benefits of each available upgrade with how much you like the look of any given piece. For instance, you might want a shirt that gives you a larger ink capacity, so you don't have to refill so often . . . but if the only shirt with that ability attached is an ugly one, will you choose function over form?

Luckily, Murch the urchin is back from Splatoon 2 and he'll let you mix and match abilities to ultimately be able to assemble exactly the look and power set you're hoping for!



ASSEMBLE AN ARSENAL
Once you've got your outfit sorted, you need to arm yourself with a weapon to wield. And good old Sheldon is back, still in charge of the Ammo Knights weapon shop, and still ready to help you go to war!

All of the weapon types from the first two Splatoon games are making a comeback, so the array of options was already going to be overwhelming. But Splatoon 3 is of course adding even more fresh choices! The game's signature new weapon is the Stringer, a bow that fires arrows of ink in three directions at the same time. There's also the sword-like Splatana, made from a car's windshield wiper! It can slice through foes with charged slashes, so watch your back!

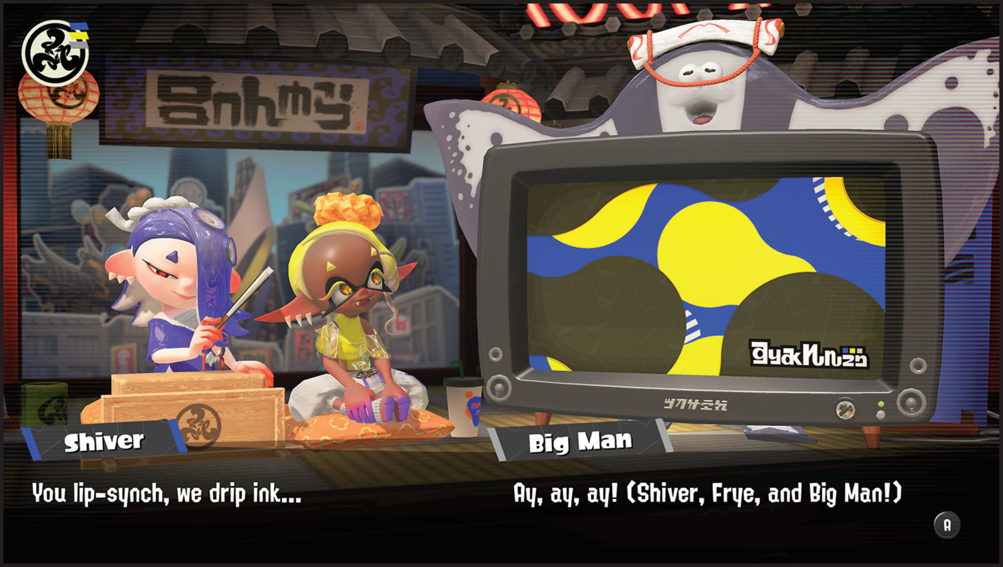
An expanded Test Range will let you try out any weapon you're interested in. It may take a while, but I'm sure you'll find one that feels right to you!

PLAYING YOUR TRUMP CARD
Sheldon would never send you out the door with just one weapon: Every main ink shooter is paired with a secondary sub-weapon like bombs you can lob for extra impact, as well as a special weapon that can only be activated after it's fully charged. The specials are major game-changers if played correctly, as they can ink huge plots of land at once, deal major damage to enemies, or both!

Some snazzy new specials debuting in Splatoon 3 include the Reefslider, which looks like a big inflatable shark: You ride on it as it charges forward in a straight line, then it explodes into a shower of ink when it reaches the end of its run. There's also the Tacticooler, a kind of battlefield refrigerator that deploys stat-boosting beverages to you and your allies. And the Inkstrike? It's now the Triple Inkstrike, firing off three missiles at the same time!

SAY HELLO TO DEEP CUT!
Want another example of Splatoon 3 embracing the number 3? How about the *three* new idols?! Splatoon 1 had the duo of Callie and Marie. Splatoon 2 introduced Pearl and Marina. But anyone who thought we were due for a third duo was off by one! The new faces of the franchise are named Shiver, Frye and Big Man! Collectively, they form a group called Deep Cut.

This trio will greet you when you jump into new play sessions, just as the previous duos did — but thankfully their news reports can be minimized! No more having to sit through a full minute (or more) of recycled banter when you just want to get down to business. You can use your Sea-Cucumber Phone to listen to Deep Cut like a podcast, while walking around Splatsville and taking care of other business like shopping, getting ready for a match or organizing your locker.



JUST LIKE HIGH SCHOOL?
Yes, you get your own locker space in Splatoon 3! It's a new place to express your own unique personality, as you can display items inside that really tell people who you are. Players will then be able to sneak a peek inside after they play in the same online match as you! (And you can look at theirs too, of course.) You'll also be able to customize your own nametags ("Splashtags") that will be shown to introduce you before multiplayer matches. Set your preferred title and background style!

IT'S TIME TO D-D-DUEL?
Here's a final surprise: Splatoon 3 has a new collectible card game inside it! It's called Tableturf Battle, and it takes the ink-slinging of Turf Wars in a whole different direction. You'll play cards that each lay down a different pattern of ink on a grid, taking turns with your opponent, who does the same. Back and forth you go until the squares get counted up at the end and a winner is declared! Over 150 cards with unique inking patterns can be found and used to build your deck.

LET THE PARTIES BEGIN AGAIN!
And here's a final non-surprise: The Splatfests are coming back! With a unique twist this time, though: Three teams will compete instead of two! After a "Halftime Report" is read, though, the first place team will have to defend their ranking against both the second and third place teams simultaneously in the new Tricolor Turf War! That's three different colors of ink all being slung at once, with the first placers also starting in the middle of the map to be at a disadvantage. The other two teams only get two players apiece, though, so it's still kind of even?

Ack! Out of room! Splatoon 3 great! Review next time! See you! — **LUCAS**

PERSONA 3 PORTABLE, PERSONA 4 GOLDEN & PERSONA 5 ROYAL

Not one, not two, but three Persona ports hit the Switch!

YOU COULD SAY that Atlus has had a change of heart when it comes to bringing the Persona series to Switch.

It certainly started off a bit weird. Joker, the protagonist of Persona 5, was added to the Super Smash Bros. Ultimate roster in 2019, while his game was still a PlayStation exclusive. Then, the Switch received two Persona sequels/spinoffs: the RPG/Musou hybrid Persona 5 Strikers in 2021, and Persona 4 Arena Ultimax, a fighting game with characters from Persona 3 and 4, earlier this year.

Switch players will soon get a more cohesive Persona experience, with three mainline Persona games arriving on Switch over the next year: Persona 5 Royal in 2022, then both Persona 3 Portable and Persona 4 Golden in 2023!

While these games have different narratives, settings and casts, they have similar gameplay systems that have come to be associated with the franchise. These include silent protagonists, dungeons, turn-based combat, a calendar system where you choose how to spend your time, bonding moments with characters called Social Links and, of course, Personas, which are spirits that can be summoned to fight alongside the heroes in battles and symbolize their wielder's inner thoughts and desires.

Persona 5 Royal will launch on October 21. It's the definitive experience of Persona 5, featuring new story content, additional characters and quality-of-life improvements in both its combat and dungeon crawling. The game follows protagonist Joker and his group known as the Phantom Thieves, who seek to reform society by changing the corrupt hearts of those in power in Tokyo.

Persona 5 oozes style, from its art design and music to its flashy combat combos. It was the JRPG that got me back into the genre, and I think if you're a fan of RPGs in general, you've got to try this one out.

Persona 3 has had a few different versions since its initial release in 2007 on PlayStation 2: Persona 3 FES came out in 2008 with extended story content, then Persona 3 Portable arrived in 2010, adding a female protagonist and changing some of the game's elements into more of a visual novel style. That's the version that will be released on Switch next year.

Its story is set in the Japanese city of Iwatodai – a city affected by the Dark Hour. This phenomenon distorts reality, and shadows terrorize the city's population. The protagonist, who's new in town, joins a group of teenagers to combat this threat and discover the truth behind it.

Persona 4 Golden takes players away from urban settings to Inaba, a rural Japanese town. The protagonist, Yu Narukami, moves there at the start of the game. Mysterious murders begin to occur among its inhabitants, prompting Yu and his friends to form the Investigation Team.

Golden boasts additional content compared to the vanilla Persona 4, including new story features, characters and cutscenes. Its Steam release sold over 1,000,000 copies! I hope all three of these games garner the same kind of success on Switch. We've been waiting long enough! **– MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: P-STUDIO
RELEASE: OCTOBER 21, 2022 (P5R); TBA 2023 (P3P & P4G) RATING: M

DRAGON QUEST TREASURES

Manage a multitude of monsters on a mission to make mucho moolah!

IF THERE'S ANYTHING as consistent as mainline Dragon Quest games, it'd be *spinoff* Dragon Quest games! From the beloved Monsters/Joker line of games to the cult classic Rocket Slime and the compelling action-RPG Builders titles, this long-running series has had plenty of success with experimentation. The latest of which is heading our way soon as a Switch exclusive: Dragon Quest Treasures!

Like the original DQ Monsters and its hero Terry, Treasures shines the spotlight on a prior party member – Erik – to lead the way. Players may recognize this scrappy thief and his little sister Mia from NF's 2019 Game of the Year, Dragon Quest XI! There, the two had a nose for treasure and big dreams to discover riches in order to improve their humble lives. In Dragon Quest Treasures, we get to witness their appetite for fortune firsthand as we play as both siblings years prior to their first encounter with The Luminary. While living their days on a Viking ship, dreaming of a better life, the two kids meet a couple mysterious creatures and are whisked away to the land of Draconia, where adventure and danger await. And, as it turns out, loads of treasure!

The pair won't be searching alone, however, as they can recruit classic, iconic DQ monsters to their side for assistance. Unlike the earlier Monsters games, Treasures plays out more like an action-adventure title, with both the human characters and the friendly creatures teaming up in real-time hack-and-slash battles.

But Erik and Mia's feral buddies also have no qualms helping them traverse Draconia in style! Having trouble reaching a high ledge? Just hop atop a Slime for an extra spring in your step! Need a hand (or wing) in order to cross a crumbling chasm? The trusty Dracky will glide you to success! And bigger creatures like the Great Sabrecat and Restless Armour will be more than willing to lend a shoulder as your personal mounts. Time to find some loot!

The goodies in question run the gamut of classic DQ items and lore, such as a statue depicting the iconic Dragonlord and the valuable Sands of Time (although the jury's still out on whether it can reset battles for you). Somehow, cherished heirlooms have all seemed to end up in this mysterious land, so we might as well sell 'em!

While seeking out priceless artifacts to make a buck, it's fortunate that the siblings have all the help they can get, because they'll be running into plenty of trouble in Draconia. Not only will less neighborly monsters make a stir, but a skeletal pirate captain and his cantankerous crew are sure to provide our heroes with a pile of problems. But if the kids can safely bring valuables back to their base, they can expand their living areas further, as well as level up their many treasure-hunting abilities.

It's encouraging to see more DQ games getting localized these days, especially since this title's fate in the West was up in the air for a while. And while it may not be the DQ Monsters sequel some were expecting, it looks like Treasures is shaping up to be its own standout spinoff that's no less appealing. It has a lot of potential for compelling gameplay, where you explore, find loot and return to your base to improve your exploring and loot-finding abilities. Mix that in with the usual DQ charm, and I'd bet this game will end up being quite the little treasure itself! **— MATTHEW T.**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX RELEASE: DECEMBER 9, 2022 RATING: E10+

MEGA MAN BATTLE NETWORK LEGACY COLLECTION

Cyberspace is under assault, but you've got a virus-busting digital defender!

IN THE YEAR 20XX (2001, if you want to be precise), the Internet was still in its relative infancy. It had advanced beyond its first steps into a form we're more familiar with today, yet had so far to go in terms of overall capability and application.

Enter: Mega Man Battle Network, a new Mega Man series from Capcom that took place in an alternate world from the more robot-centric timeline that had dominated the franchise up to that point. Rather, this version instead chose to examine the goings-on of a highly connected, network-focused society, where the reliance on the Internet had been ramped up past the point of believability and straight into high-tech science fantasy. (For instance, an incident early in the first game has an oven that malfunctions due to its connection to the network.)

Appliances that are connected to the Internet? How ludicrous is that? **looks around at all the smart ovens, fridges and other appliances that are connected to the Internet in 2022** . . . Oh. Hmm, maybe Capcom was on to something here.

Indeed, this rather forward-looking setting places you in the sneakers of one Lan Hikari, an elementary school student who is also the Operator of a Network Navigator (NetNavi) known as MegaMan.EXE. Throughout their day-to-day life in ACDC Town and Den City, Lan and MegaMan run afoul of the operations of a criminal organization known as the World Three (or WWW, for short), who use their own NetNavis and viruses to plunge the citizens' always-online lives into turmoil and despair.

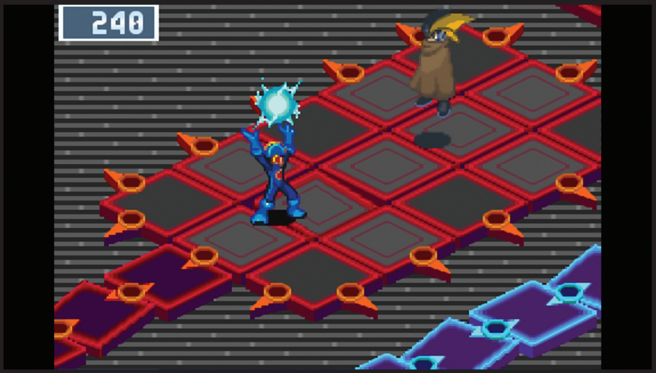
To this end, gameplay is split into a few different parts. As Lan, you go around the physical world, talking to people and finding problems. In certain areas, you can Jack-In to access ports with your PErsonal Terminal (PET), a smartphone-like device (before smartphones even existed) that houses your NetNavi, sending MegaMan.EXE into the Cyberworld, a digital landscape that he can further explore.

Unfortunately, trouble is running rampant in the Cyberworld, and various encounters (many random, some not) will lock MegaMan into what is known as a "NetBattle" against both viruses and other NetNavis. Lan supplies MegaMan with Battle Chips, which equip him with various weapons and capabilities, while MegaMan navigates one half of a 3x6 grid, trying to eliminate all the foes who occupy the opposite side. Successful deletion nets MegaMan and Lan new Battle Chips, as well as Zenny, the local currency.

That's the overall gist of things, though each new game in the series tends to add new characters and enemies, settings and capabilities for MegaMan to use. For instance, the second game introduces Style Changes, which are enhancements that are meant to complement your fighting style in NetBattles. BN4 yields Double Soul, where MegaMan takes on the appearance and abilities of other NetNavis; BN5 features strategic Liberation Battles; and BN6 lets MegaMan "Beast Out" into animalistic new forms.

Mega Man Battle Network Legacy Collection will include all 10 titles on one physical cartridge, but it will also be offered split into two volumes in the eShop, the first with four titles and the second with six. (That's because starting with the third game, Capcom released two versions of each, taking a page from the Pokémon playbook.) All are set to debut next year. **– DAVID**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RELEASE: TBA 2023
RATING: RP



PAC-MAN WORLD RE-PAC

The spherical hero's first 3D adventure has been fully reimagined!

HERE COMES A blast from the Pac-Past!

Originally released for Sony's first PlayStation in 1999 (and later adapted for the Game Boy Advance in 2004), Pac-Man World kicked off a new series of platforming adventures for the dot-chomping champion of '80s arcades. It inspired two sequels in the years that followed, but then the series went silent after Pac-Man World 3 in 2005.

But now it's coming back! Pac-Man World Re-Pac revisits the series' first 3D platformer with a modern coat of digital paint, improved U.I., retooled gameplay and new moves for the cheerful chomper. Developed by Now Production (the same developer behind the recent Pac-Man Museum + compilation) and published by Bandai Namco, Pac-Man World Re-Pac is a remake that fans of the original PS1 game have been willing into existence for years. Sometimes wishes *do* come true!

In this new remake, Pac-Man World's story and basic gameplay haven't changed. Our hero Pac-Man returns home to find that his family and friends have been kidnapped by the villainous Toc-Man and his legion of ghost baddies. He must then travel to Ghost Island and explore the six worlds found within to rescue his loved ones. As he explores Ghost Island, he'll discover themed areas just like those found in the original game, including Pirate, Space and Ruins.

Each of these areas features environmental puzzles to conquer and mazes filled with Pac-Dots and power-ups, as well as collectables such as fruit and the items needed to free the imprisoned hostages. Each area also ends with a boss battle, one of which stars one of Namco's famous villains, King Galaxian.

A fun new addition to the power-ups' consumption is that Pac-Man now transforms into Mega Pac-Man, a Hulked-out version of our hero who can easily overpower his spectral adversaries – and has the added ability of being able to destroy some of the background scenery. Pac-Man's previous abilities also return, including the Butt-Bounce, Rev-Roll and Pac-Dot Attack. But there's a new one in tow: the Hover-Jump! This floaty Yoshi-esque jump can be used to help Pac-Man cross some of the more difficult gaps in the game with less stress.

Other changes include improved gameplay to help remedy some of the unfair deaths due to falling off of ledges, as well as not needing to rescue *all* of the kidnapped Pac-Family and Friends in order to battle Toc-Man and complete the game. (Rescuing all of the hostages is recommended, however, as doing so helps with the final battle.)

One unfortunate change to the game deals with the prisoners themselves: due to legal red tape, several of the characters had to be switched out for new creations. Ms. Pac-Man is now Pac-Mom, Junior Pac-Man is now Pac-Boy, Baby Pac-Man is now Pac-Sis and Chomp-Chomp is now Pac-Buddy. These were the same changes made to Pac-Man Museum + and other recent reissues of other Pac-Man games, so it looks like Bandai Namco is sticking with these replacements until everything is sorted out in the courts.

Beyond the Quest Mode (a.k.a. the main story), two other modes are available: Maze Mode contains several 3D mazes to conquer, and the unlockable Classic Mode features the original Pac-Man arcade game from 1980.

Will Re-Pac reignite interest in the Pac-Man World series? We'll soon find out, as it'll be on store shelves by the time this issue hits mailboxes! We'll have a review next time! **– THOR**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO
DEVELOPER: NOW PRODUCTION
RELEASE: AUGUST 26, 2022 RATING: E

ATARI 50:
THE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Marking a massive milestone in video game history!

HAVE YOU PLAYED Atari today? The answer to that is probably no – but maybe not for long!

If you weren't around in the late '70s, it might be hard to understand just how big the Atari brand once was. Like Nintendo in the '80s, you didn't play "video games," you played *Atari*. Sure, there was competition, but no Odyssey, Intellivision or Colecovision could make a dent in Atari's market hold. The company has changed to the point of unrecognizability in the decades since, but they've made some recent strides toward finding a new foothold in today's market.

Continuing that trend, Atari has now announced a brand-new game compilation to celebrate the (original) company's 50th anniversary. While Atari collections are nothing new, even on the Switch, this one might just be something truly special! Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration is an all-new game compilation featuring a huge, impressive array of titles spanning the entirety of Atari's hardware history. That means unlike previous collections, this will include titles from arcades, 2600, 5200, 7800, 8-bit computers and even the Lynx and Jaguar.

Retro game preservation wizards Digital Eclipse have compiled over 90 games for this collection, and while every one included isn't an all-time classic, they're all being treated with an unprecedented level of respect, meaning that even if you're playing something not-so-great like Trevor McFur in the Crescent Galaxy for Jaguar, you'll be playing the best version possible with top-notch emulation and high-res box art, and often details explaining the game's historical significance.

While most of their early offerings are pretty easy to figure out, gaming back in the old days relied heavily on reading instructions. An in-game tutorial for something like Asteroids isn't necessary, but firing up a game like Adventure without having any idea what you're supposed to be doing can quickly make the game seem not worth your time. With instant access to manuals – many having been visually remastered for this collection – Atari 50 has an opportunity to not just preserve these games, but teach a whole new generation about what made them special in the first place.

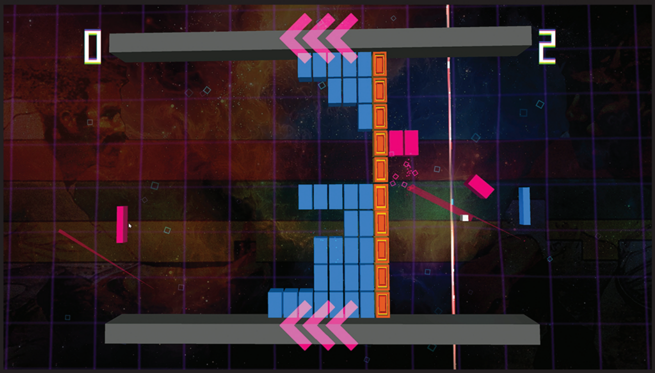
Of course, in true Digital Eclipse fashion, there's more to this collection than just old games. There are a number of exclusive interviews with various creators from Atari's past, as well as a ton of artwork, 3D models of boxes and more. All of this is displayed as an interactive timeline that runs through Atari's 50 years of existence, and also works as a sort of checklist. Might there be some kind of reward for players who complete it all?

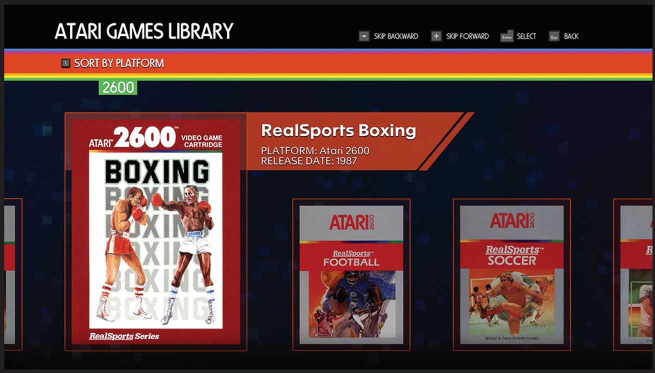
Special attention has been paid to exactly how the games control, too, with numerous options being made available for modern ways to handle things like paddle controls and the Jaguar's numeric keypads. Of course, modern quality-of-life features like save states will be included as well.

Possibly most exciting of all are the six new games being created just for this collection! Mashups like Neo Breakout and Quadratank promise fresh experiences by combining classic games, while titles like Yars' Revenge Reimagined and Haunted Houses offer colorful new takes on old favorites. The folks at Digital Eclipse have even finished the legendary lost game Swordquest Airworld, which will complete the storied Swordquest saga for the very first time!

Atari fans have a lot to be excited about in this vast collection. There are a lot of questions left to be answered, though, like what the full final lineup of games will be – we've seen roughly 50 games shown in some form, which leaves at least another 40 to be revealed. But how many more will there be? And could we see future DLC with even more? Regardless of the answers, Atari 50 is shaping up to be one heck of a celebration for old fans and Atari newcomers alike. **– KRIS**

SWITCH
PUBLISHER: ATARI
DEVELOPER: DIGITAL ECLIPSE
RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2022 RATING: RP





MARIO + RABBIDS SPARKS OF HOPE

Three new allies join the team in this super sequel!

ONE OF THE things that's surprised me the most about the Switch library is that it hasn't seen more direct, numbered sequels. All three of the games on the cover of this issue fall into that category, but over five years deep into the system's life cycle, I just thought we'd have more by now!

I mean, the gap between Ocarina of Time and Majora's Mask was just two years, so it's wild that we're still waiting for Breath of the Wild 2. The separation between the two Mario Galaxy games was two and a half years . . . so where's Super Mario Odyssey 2?

The one that really surprises me, though, is no Mario + Rabbids 2. Since Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle laid down such a strong foundation in 2017, and since Ubisoft followed it up with the Donkey Kong DLC expansion just one later, I would have absolutely predicted a straightforward, by-the-book numbered sequel that followed that same template. But that's not what we're getting!

Mario + Rabbids Spark of Hope is instead a fairly radical departure from what came before. Maybe video game designers are tiring of just expanding upon exisiting ideas, and instead want to challenge themselves to go bigger? That's definitely what we're seeing here, and I'm sure it's the same feeling driving the work of the 3D Zelda and Mario teams at Nintendo too.

Sparks of Hope and Kingdom Battle are similar to one another in that the core concept of the Mario and Rabbids universes colliding is still the driving force behind the story, and gameplay in this new sequel has still been made with the turn-based strategy genre in mind. But beyond that, the execution here is definitely different!

We've mentioned this in previous previews, but the highlight here is that the grid has been eliminated from battles. I've compared Kingdom Battle to chess in the past – you had your team of heroes, and you had a set of enemies to fight, and the space in which the conflict took place was separated into squares that locked in every combatant's movement. You'd move Mario and his allies one space away from a foe, or two spaces, or three, then attack from there – every option was built around that grid.

But not any longer! Just look at the screenshot above: Battlefields in this new sequel can have curved borders, obstacles can be placed at odd angles relative to one another . . . these arenas are definitely no longer locked into having to conform to a hidden squared-off framework underneath the action.

In fact, Ubisoft's designers have given themselves even more freedom in battlefield design by totally separating them from the overworld exploration areas too! In Kingdom Battle you'd walk through an overworld area, solve some puzzles and see some sights, then cross the threshold into a battle area and combat would begin. In Sparks of Hope, the overworlds flow however they want without having to give over huge chunks of their space to be battlefields, because you instead get whisked away to self-contained, floating-in-the-sky island arenas to do your fighting.

It even seems like many battles will be optional this time around! Dashing into free-roaming overworld enemies seems to trigger the transition to a battle scene, so you'll probably be able to avoid several fights. Or, if you want to level grind to beef up your team, you can seek extra encounters!

SWITCH PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MILAN
RELEASE: OCTOBER 20, 2022 RATING: E10+

A TOTAL SLEEPYHEAD

RABBID ROSALINA

When Rosalina was introduced in Super Mario Galaxy, she was seen acting like a caring mother to all the Lumas who live with her aboard the Comet Observatory. She even read them bedtime stories! The new character Rabbid Rosalina, on the other hand, looks like she's heard one too many bedtime stories, as she always seems to be on the verge of falling asleep wherever she is!

Though she's totally uninterested in being an action hero, Rabbid Rosalina still picks herself up and sets out on the quest to save the Sparks alongside Mario and all the other heroes. Her weapon in battle appears to be a kind of cuddly plush toy – it looks like a homemade Spark at first, but when she pulls back on its drawstring it opens its mouth to reveal a blaster is hiding inside! Also, to stay on-brand with her whole vibe, she has the power to put enemies on the battlefield to sleep. Yawn!

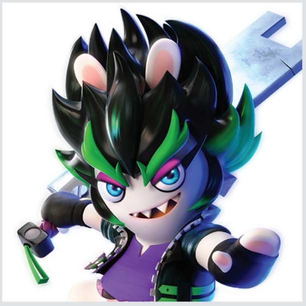
A FRIEND ONCE AGAIN

BOWSER

While King Koopa prides himself on being Mario's eternal enemy, he still sometimes decides to fight on the hero's side when it suits his interests. Here in Sparks of Hope, the rivals' goals align once again, so they re-bury their decades-old hatchet and join forces to overcome Cursa.

That malevolent force of cosmic evil drives the story of Sparks of Hope with her plot to kidnap the Sparks and drain them of their power, but she's also stolen away Bowser's entire army of minions! With his loyal subjects brainwashed, the Koopa King begrudgingly teams up with Mario in order to get them back.

Bowser brings big, brutal power to the team. His weapon is a massive shoulder-mounted blaster that lobs huge rounds of explosive ammo, each of which impacts the ground and causes damage in a wide area. I'd expect his extra heavy-hitting power to be counterbalanced by a more restrictive movement range. It's hard to hustle all that bulk around in battle!



DON'T GET CUT!

EDGE

At long last, the identity of the Sparks of Hope mystery Rabbid has been revealed! . . . Well, sort of. When this character was first seen as part of the announcement of this sequel last year, we all had trouble deciding which Mario universe character she was the Rabbid version of. Rabbid Bowser seemed like the closest possibility given her jagged teeth, strong eyebrows and flame-like hair, but then her characterization as a speedy swordwielder didn't seem to match up with what a real "Rabbid Bowser" would be like. In the end, she's not an alter ego of any Mario character! She is instead her own person, an original Rabbid simply named Edge. Nobody said Ubisoft couldn't make their own new OC!

Edge wields her sword for fast strikes in close combat situations, but she can also toss it out in front of her, twirling like a helicopter blade through the air, in order to strike any enemies standing in a straight line in front of her. Watch out!

Speaking of the team, we've got final confirmation of the full roster of playable heroes. There are now nine total compared to Kingdom Battle's eight, and the squad includes the three newcomers seen above, as well as Mario, Luigi, Peach and all of their Rabbid alter egos returning from the previous game. (Yoshi and Rabbid Yoshi, as we feared, have been confirmed to be cut from this sequel.)

Though six of the team members are familiar faces, every one of them has a different default weapon type in this return appearance! Mario will be able to dual-wield by default, striking two enemies in a single attack. Luigi has become a superstar sniper – he actually gets a damage bonus to his attacks if he's further away from his targets. Maybe game-ifying his natural nervous tendency to run as far away from danger as possible? Rabbid Mario is now a melee machine with two huge fist weapons, Rabbid Luigi tosses a Frisbee that bounces around between multiple targets, Peach has some kind of combination umbrella and cannon and Rabbid Peach now has a three-barrelled rocket launcher! (And she still has her cell phone, obvi.)

All of that would have been more than enough to get me excited about this sequel, but there's one last critical change Ubisoft has made to the team of heroes this time: Mario no longer has to be the leader! In Kingdom Battle you were forced to always keep Mario in the lead position of the squad in the main campaign – maybe it was a demand made by Nintendo as they allowed this Ubisoft dev team to take charge of their most precious mascot. But now you can sideline Jumpman in favor of any other ally taking point in exploration and battle! So who will you choose to be your team's leader? I'm torn between Luigi and Rabbid Luigi!

Then even more flexibility enters the equation with the Sparks: the little Luma/Rabbid mashup characters. One can be equipped to each hero and will tag along behind them in battle, giving them access to special elemental attacks like water waves that push foes away or jolts of electricity that stun them to restrict their movement.

And we're still just scratching the surface! It's clear that Ubisoft wanted exactly this reality: a sequel that overwhelmed returning players with fresh ideas and new content, rather than a by-the-numbers numbered sequel. It would have been nice to play a simple Mario + Rabbids 2 several years ago, and Ubi could have gone that route. But I'm happy they decided to take their time and go all-out! **– LUCAS**

HARVESTELLA

Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter . . . and then the season of death?!

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX RELEASE: NOVEMBER 4, 2022 RATING: T

WHILE THERE'S NO shortage of farming sims to play on Switch, Square Enix's upcoming take on the popular genre may breathe new life (and death) into it.

First, Harvestella has the prettiest 3D visuals of any farming sim I've ever seen. Final Fantasy veteran Isamu Kamikokuryo is handling the concept art, and the world and character designs look like a mix of the visual offerings from the Final Fantasy and Atelier series. Those aren't the typical art styles we see in farming sims, which usually feature charming 2D landscapes or are more cartoon-esque in their 3D styles.

Harvestella's combat isn't something that you'd experience in many farming sims, either. It will include a job-based action combat system with several options to choose from. A few include Fighter, with sword attacks and quick movement; Shadow Walker, with dual wielding and high damage; and Mage, with long-ranged attacks and elemental variety. You can team up with allies in combat to perform combos, and the system places importance on discovering enemy weaknesses and choosing the appropriate job to exploit them.

Another interesting detail is the season of Quietus. In Harvestella, the four normal seasons are controlled by four crystals called the Seaslight. Quietus occurs after each season when the Seaslight starts to malfunction and brings about a hostile environment. It causes crops to wither, sends a deadly dust to blow through the air and forces townspeople to stay cooped up in their homes.

Quietus is also where the story begins for Harvestella's protagonist, who you can customize by gender and appearance. The protagonist collapses after encountering the unusual season for the first time and meets Aria, a young woman who's from the future and seeking a way back home. Aria and the protagonist decide to investigate Quietus together.

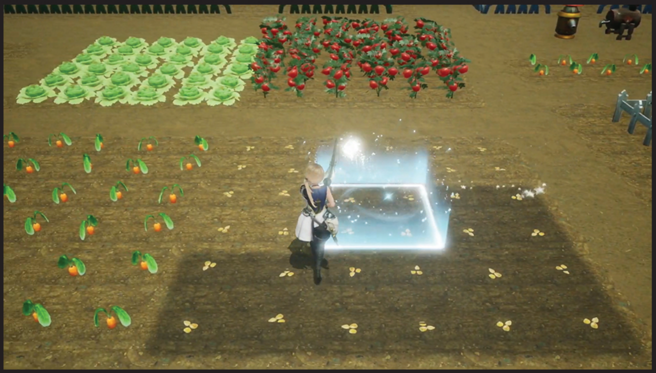
You'll have plenty of experiences beyond the main quest, too. The game will include the farming sim essentials: tilling soil and planting, watering, harvesting and shipping your crops. But Quietus will add a wrinkle to this process, since you have to factor in its regular seasonal destruction while planning and managing tasks on your farm.

Animal handling will be available, with creatures including your fluffy, horned companion Totokaku, chunky birds called Cluffowls and the goat-like Woolums. Players can also take part in fishing and crafting, which can net you useful items to use in combat.

The world of Harvestella contains multiple towns, dungeons and locales to explore, and they will be accessible through an Overworld system. Some areas include the quaint Lethe Village (where you start your journey), the seaside town of Shatolla and the frozen holy capital Argene.

Of course, since it's a farming sim, you may be wondering, "is there a romance system?" Harvestella will have characters whom you can bond with known as Comrades. By completing quests for them and viewing their stories, you increase your "closeness" with them over time. But so far, it's unclear whether the "closeness" mechanic will lead to romance, or if the relationships with Comrades will be focused on friendship instead.

What we've seen so far from Harvestella has me interested to learn more about Square's venture into the farming genre and how they'll make it their own. I'm also looking forward to more details cropping up in the next few months! **— MAGGIE**



RETURN TO MONKEY ISLAND

Guybrush Threepwood's swashbuckling days aren't done quite yet!

WHILE THE NAME Guybrush Threepwood may not mean much to you, it should! Not only is he a mighty pirate, but he's the star of one of the most beloved and important game series in the history of the point-and-click adventure genre.

The Monkey Island games have been around since 1990, and this new entry is one fans have been anticipating for a very long time. 1991's classic follow-up Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge had an incredibly bizarre ending, but when the third game finally released, series creator Ron Gilbert wasn't involved, and most of the details of exactly what went down in that conclusion were glossed over. Now, Gilbert is back at the helm! Fans will finally get some closure and make sense of just what happened between Guybrush and his longtime nemesis.

While seeing exactly what Gilbert and company have in store for this new chapter has people excited, many are less excited about the game's bold new art direction. It's true that the Monkey Island games have never exactly looked identical from entry to entry, but there was always a sort of visual throughline that tied them all together. Return to Monkey Island is throwing all that directly out the window with a considerably more abstract style than any entry before it. Returning voice actors make it a lot easier to feel a nostalgic connection, but the new papercraft/marionette-inspired look is divisive to say the least. Whether or not it looks "good" is going to be a matter of personal taste, but fortunately for us all, the series' heart and soul has always been in the writing, and that seems as good as ever.

You can check out the game's official website to play through a sort of demo where you talk to a used ship/coffin salesman named Stan, a series regular who has found himself in prison. Here you can see that the game's razor-sharp wit and colorful personality are as brilliant as ever, which should be more than enough to keep everyone happy.

It's unfortunate that the previous Monkey Island titles aren't available on Switch – especially the remasters of the first two games, considering their connection to this new one – but since this new sequel doesn't have a defined release date quite yet, you probably have time to seek out those earlier adventures (via Steam, maybe) and get yourself up to speed before it debuts. But regardless of your history with Guybrush and his friends, Return to Monkey Island looks like it will have plenty to offer to longtime fans and aspiring pirates alike! **– KRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: DEVOLVER DIGITAL DEVELOPERS: TERRIBLE TOYBOX & LUCASFILM GAMES RELEASE: TBA 2022 RATING: T

DORAEMON STORY OF SEASONS: FRIENDS OF THE GREAT KINGDOM

An unexpected sequel to an underwhelming spinoff.

THE DORAEMON SPINOFF of Story of Seasons has inspired a sequel, with another adventure featuring Noby, Doraemon, Sue, Big G and Sneech set to release on the Switch later this year. Doraemon Story of Seasons: Friends of the Great Kingdom gets started when Doraemon's rocket ship takes the kids to another Earth-like planet, home to a scenic farming village and a grand fairytale castle. What sort of adventures and mysteries will they encounter here?

When Doraemon and the kids arrive on this new planet, they meet a child named Lumis, who gives them a patch of farmland to develop. Not only are there trees and crops to grow and animals to raise, there are also decorations that can be crafted, fish to catch and even places to farm and forage under the sea and in the sky. There's also a local village and some new friendly faces to play games with and invite on camping trips!

One new addition that Friends of the Great Kingdom will introduce is local co-op! You can go into a two-player mode where one player controls Noby while the other takes charge of Doraemon as the two of you work together.

Hopefully it's not just limited to working on your farm — mining was a tedious activity in the original Doraemon Story of Seasons, and having a helping hand there would be welcome. Also, hopefully there's a much larger inventory system with more space for both crops and Doraemon's wacky inventions, like the Time Kerchief and the Instant Wardrobe Cam! **— REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO DEVELOPERS: BROWNIES & MARVELOUS RELEASE: TBA 2022 RATING: E

DISNEY DREAMLIGHT VALLEY

It's a whole new Disney world!

HAVE YOU PLAYED the Disney Magical World games and found their Disney magic to be a little . . . lacking? Or are you a fan of Animal Crossing looking for something new? Then make your move from the Magic Kingdom to Dreamlight Valley! Coming to Nintendo Switch in September, Gameloft's Disney Dreamlight Valley is a sandbox life sim for Disney fans who might be looking for Disney magic that's a little bit more grown-up.

Like Bandai Namco's Disney Magical World games, Dreamlight Valley features different themed environments, character customization, interior decorating and crafting, but on a much larger and expanded scale that's comparable to EA's The Sims franchise.

As a new arrival to the Valley, you'll find it as a shadow of its former self, with the Dream Castle choked with thorns caused by an event ominously known as "The Forgetting." To end the nightmare and bring the magic back to the Valley, you'll take on tasks like mining, gardening, cooking and interacting with characters from all sorts of Disney and Pixar properties, from Mickey and Minnie to Buzz and Woody.

Hang out at Dazzle Beach with Moana and Ariel, dress your best with various customizable fashion pieces perfect for Disneybounding, grow a garden with WALL-E as your helper and go on epic quests to unlock worlds inspired by The Lion King, Frozen and more. It's a world you'll help create as you save it, and there will be all sorts of new content added as time goes on. I'm looking forward to creating tasty meals at Chez Remy and shopping at Uncle Scrooge's store!

Gameloft will be making an Early Access period available by an exclusive Founder's Pack purchase on consoles and PC until early 2023, when Dreamlight Valley will be free-to-play, with paid character and house customization DLC. So probably no retail cartridge release for this one! **— REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: GAMELOFT RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 6, 2022 RATING: E

NO MAN'S SKY

An entire galaxy is yours to explore!

SOMETIMES BEING A Nintendo player first and foremost can be frustrating, as major cross-platform projects almost always arrive on the Big N's hardware a long time after they debut elsewhere (or else they never come to Nintendo at all). In the case of No Man's Sky, though, it seems like a late arrival on Switch is a blessing!

When this game first launched on PC and PS4 back in 2016, it was plagued with problems. Features that had been promised weren't in place yet; fans whose expectations had ballooned to unreachable heights were understandably disappointed, and they got very vocal about that. The developers at Hello Games found themselves in the middle of a firestorm of negativity, and they've spent most of the last six years slowly navigating their way out of it.

Thankfully, No Man's Sky is now in a much better, more playable and more fully featured place. The players who'll experience it for the first time on the Switch will get to reap the benefits of over half a decade's worth of critical updates, while also avoiding all the anger that swirled around it in its earliest days.

So what is this game, exactly? It's a grand space exploration adventure defined by procedurally generated planets. You blast off and soar through the galaxy, and when you find an interesting new planet to investigate, you can be assured that no other player on Earth has ever discovered exactly that same world! You'll get unique landscapes to travel across, local flora and fauna that no one else has ever seen before and battles against aliens that no other player has ever encountered. Your space story is entirely yours alone!

It's a truly ambitious game – which is why it couldn't quite live up to all its promises at first. But hopefully the version that's soon shipping for Switch will represent No Man's Sky at its best! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: HELLO GAMES RELEASE: OCTOBER 7, 2022 RATING: T

NIER:AUTOMATA THE END OF YORHA EDITION

2B, or not 2B? That's no longer the question!

SPEAKING OF GETTING major multiplatform games several years later, the award-winning action RPG NieR:Automata is finally bound for the Switch after a wait of five and a half years! This one launched on PS4 less than a week after the Switch hardware itself first went on sale back in 2017, so it's been quite a wait to see this port revealed!

Just like No Man's Sky, though, Switch owners will get to benefit from all of the extra developments that have gone into this title over the intervening years – since this isn't just the base NieR:Automata game, but rather the new "End of YoRHa Edition" that's packed with all previously released DLC, as well as some new costumes that are exclusive to the Switch!

NieR:Automata takes place far into the future, in the year 11945. Earth has been conquered by alien robots, and the human population has been devastated. The survivors have taken refuge on the moon and are planning a counterattack to retake humanity's home planet!

You take on the role of a battle android named 2B. Your mission: Make landfall on Earth and hack and slash your way through every alien robot you see! Gameplay is a satisfying ballet of heavy and light attacks, dodging out of the way of enemies' assaults and reciprocating with well-timed retaliating slashes. If you're a fan of other PlatinumGames fare like Bayonetta and Astral Chain, this game will be right up your alley.

It also has a ton of replay value! Playing through the story and reaching the ending is only the beginning, as there are multiple different endings to discover, so you'll need to leap back into action after the credits roll to keep revealing more of the story! Your quest to see them all will be able to begin on Switch this October. **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX DEVELOPER: PLATINUM GAMES RELEASE: OCTOBER 6, 2022 RATING: M

THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS FROM ZERO

It's finally time to explore Crossbell! (Officially, that is.)

IT'S BEEN MORE than a year since Trails from Zero was announced for the West, and sometimes I still can't believe it!

This Trails adventure was initially released in 2010 in Japan on the PlayStation Portable platform – but it, along with its direct sequel Trails to Azure, were never officially localized for America. Until now!

If you're unfamiliar with Nihon Falcom's Trails series of JRPGs, you may not realize why this is such a big deal. The Trails franchise features several sub-series of games, and they're all connected to one another by setting, characters, lore and an overarching conflict and story.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA DEVELOPERS: NIHON FALCOM & GEOFRONT RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 27, 2022 RATING: T

Trails from Zero and Trails to Azure represented a missing piece of the overall story. While the Trails in the Sky and Trails of Cold Steel games came West over the years, Zero and Azure didn't. Since this series focuses so much on interconnectivity, it left a big void for players.

A group known as The Geofront stepped in to bridge this gap, creating high-quality fan translations of Zero and Azure. In an exciting turn of events, NIS America partnered with the Geofront team last year, using their translations as the basis for the official releases of Zero and Azure in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

Trails from Zero will arrive on the Switch on September 27. Its story follows the adventures of the Special Support Section of the Crossbell Police Department.

The SSS consists of Lloyd Bannings, rookie detective and protagonist; Elie MacDowell, the granddaughter of Crossbell's mayor; Randy Orlando, a fun-loving former member of the Crossbell Guardian Force; and Tio Plato, a young prodigy from the tech-focused Epstein Foundation.

Trails from Zero continues the series' theme of weaving political and supernatural elements together for an engrossing narrative, and it begins with Crossbell's setting.

Crossbell is a small buffer state situated between two great powers: the Empire of Erebonia (featured in the Cold Steel games) and the Republic of Calvard. While Crossbell retains its independence, it is often embroiled in political tension from both sides, leading to a lot of criminal activity.

As you take on the role of the SSS to face these threats, you'll employ Trails' AT Battle system. The turn-based system lets you manipulate the turn order in combat to your advantage, so you can get bonuses and keep enemies at bay. It also features abilities called Crafts, which are unique to each character, and Arts, which can be equipped to characters via elemental quartz.

If you're new to the Trails series, Trails from Zero would serve as a fine entry point, especially if you play exclusively on Switch. Currently, Trails of Cold Steel III and IV are the only other Trails games on the platform, and with those, you're entering into the middle of an arc and are bound to have questions. (But if you want to go all-in with the series, I recommend starting with the Trails in the Sky games.)

Whether Zero is your first Trails experience, your fourth or even your seventh (like me), know that you'll be in for a JRPG adventure like no other!
– MAGGIE

THE DIOFIELD CHRONICLE

Square Enix's latest strategy game bleeds into the real world!

SQUARE ENIX IS pushing further into tactical territory, as just a few months ago we got Triangle Strategy, and now they have another strategy game set for September. The DioField Chronicle will seek to stand out by breaking free of both the in-game grid . . . and the game world itself!

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX DEVELOPERS: SQUARE ENIX & LANCARSE RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 22, 2022 RATING: T

Within the video game, gameplay in The DioField Chronicle plays out on 3D battlefields with real-time movement for your troops and no constraints on how they need to move around the map. Issuing skillful movement orders is a big part of the strategy here, as you need to direct your forces around the enemies' area of attention in order to ambush them from behind or flank them from either side. It's enjoyably different from just about any tactical game I've previously played!

Outside of the video game, in the real world, gameplay continues for The DioField Chronicle in the form of a physical board game! Available for those who choose to splurge on the $169.99 Collector's Edition in Square Enix's online store, the game is a two-to-four player competition to gain the most fame while battling across the expanse of DioField Island. It's a wild and complex supporting item to make to help push a brand-new IP, and I'm impressed by the effort put into it!

. . . But will there be enough of an audience willing to spend that much on a never-before-seen brand? I hope this IP doesn't fizzle before it has a chance to even find its footing!

If you want to give it a try yourself, there's a free demo of The DioField Chronicle available in the eShop. (The video game, not the board game. It's hard to download cardboard.) The demo lets you play through the first story chapter and your progress will carry over if you choose to purchase the full game afterward! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: PLATINUMGAMES
RELEASE: OCTOBER 28, 2022 RATING: M

BAYONETTA 3

Nintendo's witch will return just in time for Halloween!

THEY SAY THAT three is the magic number. In Bayonetta 3's case, that means seeing at least three fabulous, phantasmagorical witches taking the stage – but at least one of them is . . . also Bayonetta?! That's right folks, Bayo is headed to the multiverse, on a collision course with a coven of alternate versions of herself.

We've only seen one of these new Bayonettas (Baynewettas?) so far, but if this debut derivative debutant is any indication, they'll all be even more extravagantly adorned and deliciously decadent than the original. Clad in ornate red and gold fineries, with a shiny eyepatch to match, this choo choo-loving lady will fly onto the scene in an old-fashioned locomotive and use a tank turret on her caboose to demolish anything that might endanger her universe. Our "regular" Bayonetta looks positively tame by comparison (but can you really call a lady who wears clothes made from her own hair "regular"?).

The third witch in the spotlight is a fresh-faced newcomer named Viola. She's a sword-wielding butch black magic user-in-training who likes to use a grappling hook to get around. Dripping with glam and slam, she's equal parts rebellious and childlike, fierce and vulnerable, riding a giant, ferocious stuffed animal monster cat-thing named Cheshire into battle. We've only seen a few pieces of her cutscenes so far, where she simultaneously pushes against the grain while accepting guidance from her senior sorceresses. But underneath it all, her real focus is on a devilishly enigmatic man whose role in her life remains elusive. She may even cry over him!

As if that weren't enough newness, Bayo has also gained the power to take direct control over her pet kaiju! She's been summoning since Day 1, but now she can also manipulate them like she's playing a motion-controlled video game, dancing in the foreground as they do battle in the background. Other times she transforms into them directly (if only for a little while).

Shapeshifting isn't new to our casually magical superheroine, but in the past, Bayo might nonchalantly turn into a panther, or dress up like Link or Samus. Now she can become a full-on, half-naked butterfly person, or embody a giant firebreathing lizard as it scraps with other walking disasters the size of skyscrapers.

The powers of Bayonetta and her companions are reaching new heights, and the threats they're up against have scaled up to match. The angels and demons that define the series are still around, but they've been joined by new man-made bioweapons called Homunculi. They're creepy in a way that's unlike anything Bayo has seen before, gushing neon-aqua slime while stumbling toward their potential victims with an unsettlingly robotic zombie shuffle. Some are the size of a person, others as big as a house, but one thing ties them together: an unseen puppet master pulling their strings.

Who's the mastermind behind these techno-organic troublemakers, and how did they amass enough power to tangle with three world-wandering witches at once? In past Bayonetta games, godly deities and heavenly fathers were often the ultimate antagonists. For a change of pace, it's possible that this time the last boss will be a regular person, or even a super science-powered variant of Bayo herself! Regardless of who the final fight is with, it's bound to be the

biggest battle in the franchise's history – because this time, it's not just heaven, the underworld and the human realm on the line. It's the very nature of reality itself hanging in the balance!

The true identity of the shadowy antagonists of Bayonetta 3 isn't the only new mystery on the docket here. In fact, we still don't even know exactly who this "new" Bayonetta is! She could be the star from the first two games with a new look, but with the whole multiverse angle in full effect, there's a good chance she's Cereza, the little girl from Bayonetta 1. Last we saw her, she was just a kid in pigtails, but that was about 14 years ago in real life. Could it be that she grew up in a separate timeline and took the mantle of Bayonetta Prime? And why is Viola's familiar named Cheshire? Isn't that the same name that Bayonetta mockingly calls Luka, her could-be love interest from the past? And why is Jeanne, Bayo's "gal pal," all prettied up in pink now?! Fashion-conscious enquiring minds want to know!

The topic of clothes brings us to what might be Bayonetta 3's biggest surprise: Bayo now has the power to actually keep her clothes on! As fans know, that's a big change. This series has always worked to combine feminism with cheesecake. Bayonetta herself was born from the unholy union of light and dark, so it's part of her birthright to thumb her nose at being a "respectable woman." Though some may objectify her, or see her as lewd and crude, she always walks her own path with class and confidence.

But that type of empowerment hasn't always been granted to the people playing Bayonetta's games. Just because she likes to let her hair down and bare it all, that doesn't mean all her fans want to see the sorceress's assets in such painstaking detail. Thanks to the new "Naive Angel Mode," fans will be able to choose for themselves how much of that skin they'll see. Toggle it on and Bayo will refrain from going commando, even when she transforms into a giant insect woman! It's not clear how far these new modesty options will go, but they may extend into gore and adult language as well. If you're a parent who loves these kinds of superhero games, you may finally be able to share this one with your kids without fear of freaking them out or teaching them a variety of unsavory curse words.

Along those lines, it would be great if Bayonetta 2's touchscreen/easy operation mode made a comeback. It's perfect for those who don't want to dig too deep into the franchise's moderately complex combat system. For those who do, though, this new iteration will stay true to all the stuff that made the fighting fantastic in the past. Pulling off long combos on hordes of rampaging ruffians has never looked so fun.

And if you're new to the series and want to play through each title in order before you take the leap with 3, Bayonetta 1 is getting an in-store, $30 Switch re-release in September. This new batch of carts is a limited run, so if the permanence of physical media is a priority for you, be sure to pre-order.

Not to be outdone by its predecessors, Bayonetta 3 is also getting a limited "Trinity Masquerade" special edition that comes with a 200-page art book. It's quite a beauty! See more about it below!

After what feels like an eternity, Bayonetta's bodacious new outing is finally set for release on October 28, 2022. Seeing our fashionably late, infamous leading lady make it to our doorsteps just in time for Halloween is the perfect trick and treat. That said, this won't be the end of the witch's fun on Switch: Her new game will also get some follow-up DLC at some point, so her story will extend even further.

The future of Nintendo/Sega/Platinum's premiere supernatural exhibitionist has never been brighter!

– JONATHAN

FOR SERIOUS FANS OF THE SERIES

THE TRINITY MASQUERADE EDITION

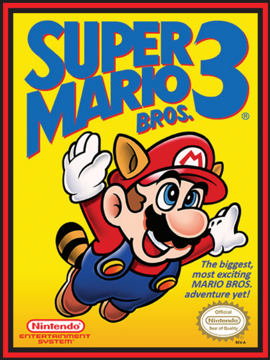
If you're the kind of fan who's been following Bayonetta's journey from the beginning – or if you're just stepping into her fandom and need to play a little catch-up – the special Trinity Masquerade Edition of Bayonetta 3 might be worth investing a few extra dollars in! For $30 more than the standard release alone, you'll also score an expansive art book and three different alternate art covers, each emblazoned with artwork from one of her three different games. They're all sure to look stylish on your shelf!

BY JOHN-CHARLES HOLMES

NINTENDO'S FIRST "3" GAME

DONKEY KONG 3
NES, 1986

Donkey Kong was made in 1981 largely in response to arcade gamers being uninterested in Nintendo's vertical shooter Radarscope . . . so why, for 1983's Donkey Kong 3, did they try to move right back into that same territory? This game swept aside the running and jumping action that made Donkey Kong such a hit, replacing it with a challenge to blast bug spray up the screen and into the big ape's backside. Mario also got the boot for this sequel, as an exterminator named Stanley became the new face of the franchise! It was too much change too quickly, and the game suffered further in its home conversion (seen here), which lost a lot of the coin-op cabinet's vertical screen real estate. This "3" was just plain odd. — **LUCAS**



ORIGINAL RELEASE: FAMICOM, OCTOBER 23, 1988; NES, FEBRUARY 12, 1990
PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO

PLAYING IT TODAY

Super Mario Bros. 3 became one of the best-selling video games of all time almost immediately upon release, and has retained that status for over three decades now, meaning literally millions of copies of its original cartridges are still out there in the wild. Even if you don't have the means to play old NES carts, it's still the mark of a true Nintendo fan to have an SMB3 in your collection!

Beyond those first physical versions, Super Mario Bros. 3 has been ported, re-ported and re-launched several times over the years, adding many more ways to revisit it today. It famously got a 16-bit graphical upgrade when it became part of the compilation game Super Mario All-Stars on the SNES. Then that Super version was souped up even further for Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3 on the Game Boy Advance. That version even got some extra levels added into it!

Digitally, SMB3 has served as a flagship release of the NES library on the Wii Virtual Console, then again on 3DS and Wii U. Those are going away soon, but the game is now also part of the digital lineup available for Nintendo Switch Online subscribers – it's in the NES app, but also in the SNES app by way of Super Mario All-Stars. It's on the mini NES Classic too!

Also available at this particular moment in history is the original Japanese version of the game, accessible to NSO subscribers who download the Famicom app. If you've never played that one before, give it a run for a bit of extra challenge! Mario reverts all the way back to his smallest form after taking a hit while powered up, meaning you have to play a little more cautiously. (That was changed during the localization.)

33 YEARS LATER SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

Remembering the NES masterpiece that made "3" such an important number!

THE HYPE CYCLE caught me.

I fell straight into Mario mania, hook, line and sinker. I was the perfect target for Nintendo's marketing efforts in the months leading up to the launch of Super Mario Bros. 3 in North America – a 9-year-old boy who already owned an NES system – and I can quickly confirm that their targeting found its mark. I was exceedingly eager to get my hands on "The biggest, most exciting MARIO BROS. adventure yet!" even before The Wizard opened in theaters, and after watching this surefire masterpiece's gameplay debut on a massive screen, surrounded by a crowd of other video game-crazed kids just like me, I was done. I knew Super Mario Bros. 3 would be a defining part of my life!

(Seeing as I've since grown up to be a Nintendo magazine editor, that turned out to be pretty true!)

The best thing about that whole era of Nintendo history is that the hype for Super Mario Bros. 3 was entirely earned – the game really did live up to all of the buzz surrounding it. Since it had launched in Japan over a year earlier, Nintendo of America was fully aware of the quality of the product they were being called upon to promote. And they went all-out, as they should have!

Even now, 33 years after that hype cycle really started revving up, Super Mario Bros. 3 is still universally recognized as an industry masterpiece. So let's turn our gaze back to the past once again, to examine all the ways this super sequel met, and exceeded, all of its soaring expectations.

I CAN SHOW YOU THE WORLD

Blowing young NES players' minds from the very first moment after pressing Start on the title screen was the fact that Super Mario Bros. 3 didn't take you straight into an action stage. Instead, you were greeted with the Mario series' first-ever world map! The whole of Grass Land sprawled out before you on a single screen, with six numbered tiles marking entry points to stages, a pair of mushroom-shaped Toad houses, a spot that launched you into a matchmaking minigame, a fortress, a castle and even a wandering Hammer Bro who'd walk around the map to land on a different spot every time you exited a level. Not to mention the dancing trees, grooving to the background music!

It was a ton to take in all at once, and what's more, the maps weren't just a splashy intermission between stages. There was strategy involved in how you moved through them! Split paths let you choose one level over another: For example, clearing either 1-3 or 1-4 would let you progress to the first Toad House. Game Overs were taken into account with locked doors serving as checkpoints: If you beat the Boom Boom in the game's first fortress, but then lost all your lives at some point after that, you wouldn't have to go through the first few levels again, as a newly open path would take you straight to 1-5. Later worlds even had maps spanning multiple screens, with the eastern edge of World 2 (seen below) actually hidden from view until you used a Hammer item to break a rock in the road!

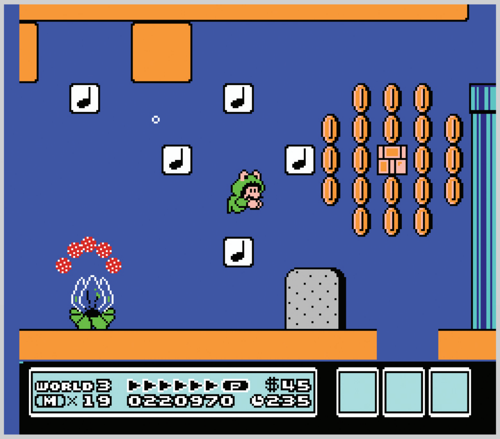
THE PLUMBER'S TOOL BELT

Speaking of the Hammer, Mario got a whole array of new items in this adventure that were all meant to work on the map screen only! There was a Music Box that would lull wandering Hammer Bros to sleep. There was Jugem's Cloud (a.k.a. "Lakitu's Cloud") that would let you skip over one level without playing it. The infamous Warp Whistles – only three of which could be found in the whole game – summoned a cyclone that swept Mario off to the Warp Zone, letting him skip over entire Worlds and quickly move much deeper into the adventure. And then there was the Anchor! Did any of you ever find the Anchor? Did any of you ever actually have a chance to *use* the Anchor? An incredibly rare item, its function was to keep a Koopaling's Airship from fleeing across the map if you attempted to beat the ship, but failed, while it was in your inventory. An uncommon situation!

THE PLUMBER'S COSTUME CLOSET

Perhaps the limited usability of nearly all of the map screen items is why that idea didn't really continue beyond this one game. But the other items available to fill Mario's inventory absolutely did inspire the future of the series: his many different power-up suits!

Super Mushrooms, Fire Flowers and Invincibility Stars all returned from the first Super Mario Bros. game, but the iconic trio of transformations they triggered were joined by six more new Mario forms. The most famous was on the cover: the flying Raccoon Mario!



In its opening moments, Super Mario Bros. 3 seemed to play just like the old SMB – Mario walked to the right, hit some Question Blocks, grabbed a Super Mushroom to grow and encountered a Goomba, a Piranha Plant and a Koopa Troopa. But soon thereafter, players came across a new power-up: a lazily falling leaf. Nabbing it added an extra pair of ears to Mario's head, as well as a raccoon tail to his rear end! Then soon thereafter that, a trail of coins led up into the sky – far too high to simply jump and grab them. The solution? Building up speed by running along the ground, then leaping into flight by flapping the new raccoon tail with fervor!

I'm not sure exactly why Nintendo's designers decided a raccoon costume equated to flying powers (Super Mario 64's Wing Cap makes a more obvious connection to taking to the sky), but the logic didn't matter! Mario could fly!

The raccoon tail also equipped Mario with a spinning melee attack, adding to an offensive arsenal that had previously only included jumping on top of foes' heads. He got a new defensive trick to try out too: Tracking down the rare Tanooki Suit gave Mario all of the same powers as his Raccoon form, but also added the ability to shapeshift into the impervious Statue Mario!

There was more! Mario turned the tables on the Hammer Bros by stealing their look with the new Hammer Bro Suit, which both let him chuck his own endless supply of hammers as projectiles and duck into a fireproof shell to save himself from fireball attacks. Then there was the Frog Suit, the savior of underwater levels thanks to its speedy swimming – but its tradeoff was that it made Mario's movements on land feel awkward. (It became a mark of true achievement to don the Frog Suit and carry it forward through difficult non-water levels without getting hit.)

The sixth new form: a shoe! (But see the sidebar for more about that.)

THE CREATIVE KINGDOMS

I haven't even mentioned the story yet, have I? Well, it's a safe assumption with any Mario series sequel that Bowser has kidnapped Princess Peach, and that's the foundation of the tale here too. But other royals are also involved: seven kings in seven kingdoms have also been accosted by the Koopa Clan, and forced to transform into animals! (Mario turns himself into a raccoon and a frog by choice. Having such a metamorphosis inflicted upon you without consent, though, isn't cool.) The path to the princess leads through all of these different monarch's domains, and each one is entirely distinct from the others.

Grass Land eases you into the quest as World 1, starting with simple side-scrolling and rolling hills, but also giving you a taste of auto-scrolling and some more precarious platforming over large open pits. Desert Land heats things up with trickier traps like quicksand, a swirling tornado and an Angry Sun that swoops out of the sky to scorch you! (That's all in one level, too.) Water Land is where the Frog Suit shines, but it's also home to mazelike fortresses and bridges on the map that don't allow you to cross whenever you want. Sky Land starts you on terra firma, then sends you into the clouds by way of a unique Tower of Babel-inspired transition level; Ice Land is an extra-long and extra-hard slog through slippery snow areas; Pipe Land is an elaborate maze of twisted passageways that is a true accomplishment to clear (since most players just warp straight past it).

But the most iconic of them all? Giant Land, of course! World 4 in SMB3 was another mind-blowing spectacle for young NES aficionados, as it held huge enemies the likes of which we'd never seen before! I remember when my grandparents bought the first "big screen" TV I'd ever seen – I excitedly brought our NES over to their house to hook it up and play SMB3 to Giant Land just to be extra amazed by immensity!

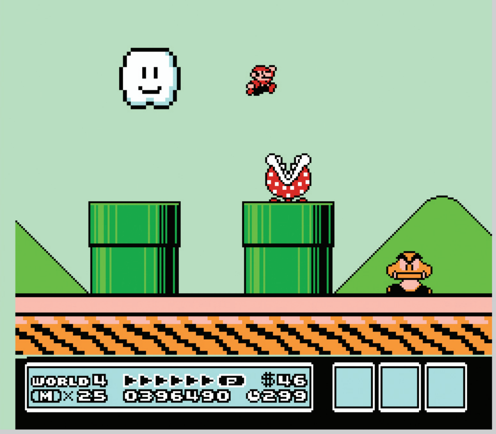
EXPANDING THE KOOPA FAMILY

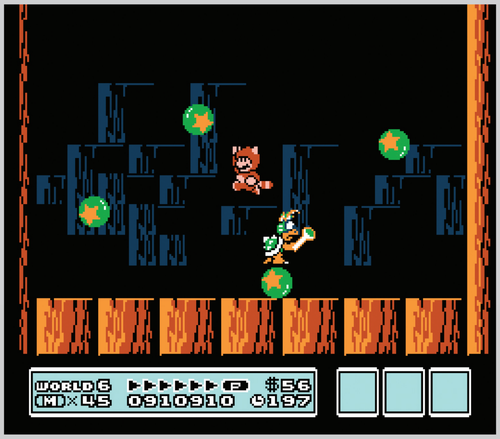
One weird part of the first Super Mario Bros. was that you could see the game's final boss in just the fourth level: King Koopa appeared to oppose the plumber at the end of every castle. (Lorewise only the last one was the "real" Bowser, but still.) Super Mario Bros. 3 solved that problem by giving the King seven new kids! The Koopalings each watched over one of the first seven Worlds, and Mario's task was to bop them and take back the Magic Wands they'd used to dethrone and dehumanize the kings. Each Koopaling had his or her own style – from Wendy tossing rings around her arena to Roy causing earthquakes with his jumps to Lemmy filling his boss fight with bouncing balls. Reaching and defeating them all was incredible!

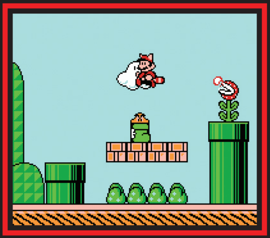
SMB3 impacted the series even more with its new array of lesser foes: This game marked the first appearance of Boos, Thwomps, Dry Bones, Spikes and more! The sensational soundtrack is still remixed and referenced today. A full remake of the original arcade Mario Bros. game was even included as a two-player minigame contest! Nintendo's designers really went overboard in every possible way!

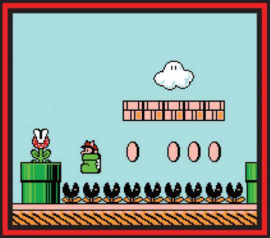
NEVER THE SAME AGAIN

Super Mario Bros. 3 packed so many wild new ideas into one game that the Mario series was elevated to an insane new height, and it's only soared higher since. The long wait time leading up to its localized release in North America also impacted the video game industry forever, as it set a new high bar for pre-release hype and gave marketing teams exceptional insight on how to whip young game players into a frenzy over the promise of new games coming over the horizon. And, well, whether it was my impressionable young mind getting molded just the way Nintendo wanted or not, that lead up to and launch of Super Mario Bros. 3 did really become a cherished childhood chapter! **– LUCAS**



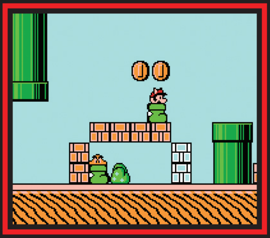


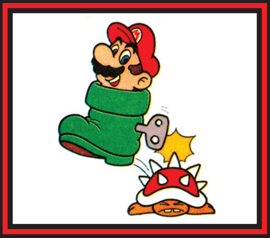




AN ODE TO KURIBO'S SHOE

I have to give my absolute favorite part of Super Mario Bros. 3 its own special section here: It's the shoe. Kuribo's Shoe! (You can call it "Goomba's Shoe" if you like, but the original SMB3 manual said it was Kuribo's Shoe, so I'll never think of it any differently.) This special power-up appeared in *only one level* in the entire game! It was this fleetingly magical thing – introduced so quickly and then swept aside so quickly that you had to wonder whether you imagined it! Kuribo's Shoe was only seen in World 5-3. There, Mario explored normally until encountering an odd Goomba that was hopping around in an over-sized shoe. If you stomped it like normal, you got nothing – but if you attacked it by breaking a brick underneath its "foot" then the Goomba would be defeated, but the shoe would stay behind. Then Mario could jump inside of it himself! "Shoe Mario" moved along in odd hops, had a weirder-than-normal floating jump and, best of all, had expanded defense on his underside: The sole of Kuribo's Shoe could safely step on nibbling Muncher plants, and it could safely stomp on enemies that were normally unstompable, like Piranha Plants and Spinies! Kuribo's Shoe was sensational, and it's since reappeared in the Super Mario Maker series!





30 YEARS LATER
MEGA MAN III

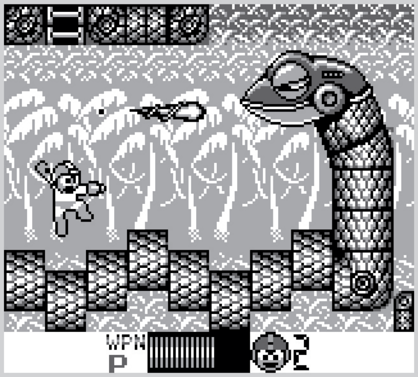
The midpoint of the Blue Bomber's Game Boy series was also its turning point!

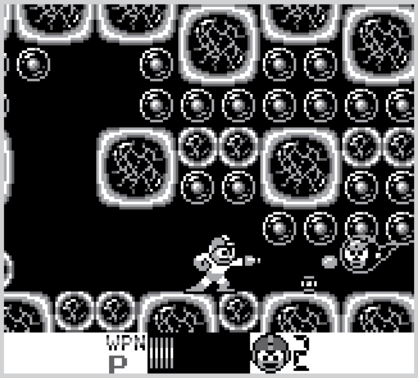
THE INTRODUCTION OF the Game Boy saw a number of our video game favorites hit the road with Portable Power: Super Mario, The Legend of Zelda, Metroid, Kid Icarus, Castlevania, Contra and more. Some landed on the platform with a bit more grace than others.

Mega Man could be argued to be one of those "others."

Developed by Minakuchi Engineering, 1991's Mega Man: Dr. Wily's Revenge (Rockman World in Japan) was a bit of a rough start to things. A higher-than-normal level of difficulty – brought on in no small part by Mega Man's large size on the tiny screen – has made the title rather divisive. Well-received in its day, it's lost a bit of its luster over time, especially in light of the better games released later on.

The second game (often denoted as "Mega Man II" to distinguish it from its NES cousin) would arrive a year later, thanks to a different developer: Biox. According to the series' most notable artist at the time, Keiji Inafune, Biox had little knowledge of the Mega Man series, leading to a rather different-feeling product. To its credit, despite its oddities, it provided a fairer challenge and felt like an overall smoother experience than its predecessor.



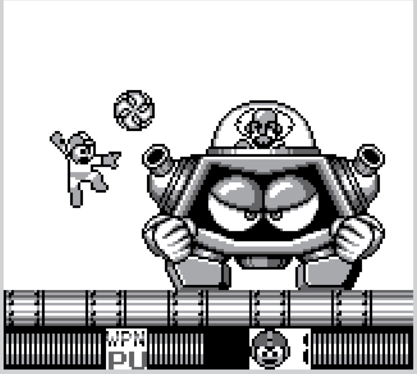


That brings us to the third game in the Game Boy line. Mega Man III saw the return of the development team at Minakuchi Engineering to the series, and it's where things seemed to finally click, marking something of a turning point in the series. The Game Boy Mega Man games, of which there are five in total (not counting Mega Man Xtreme and its sequel years later, which were developed internally by Capcom themselves), could be argued to get better with each successive entry.

The third game falls squarely in the middle of that progression. While it doesn't reach the heights of Mega Man IV or the wholly original Mega Man V (the first four effectively being "remixes" of elements from the NES games with a few new things sprinkled in), it also doesn't feel as almost bootleg-ish as Mega Man II or as painful as the stumbling first attempt that was Dr. Wily's Revenge. By neither being the cream of the crop nor so bad that it practically *begs* for attention, Mega Man III seems to suffer from middle child syndrome, often being overlooked on account of the triumphs or the tribulations of the others in the series.

Mega Man III ostensibly (it's never quite been fully confirmed) takes place after the events of Mega Man 4 on the NES, but prior to those of Mega Man 5. Following in the footsteps of its predecessors, it takes four of its Robot Masters from the third NES game, then another four from the fourth to supplement them. Throw in a new Wily Castle and Wily Station, plus a new Mega Man Killer named Punk (see sidebar), and the Blue Bomber's got an ample challenge on his hands. Fortunately, he's got Eddie on hand for backup and can now charge his Mega Buster to even the odds a bit!

With the series back on track, Minakuchi would go on to produce Mega Man IV and V, which rival – and some would say surpass – some of the NES games. They'd introduce the ideas of collectable currencies and an item shop to the series, as well as the Mega Arm – concepts that would all be added to the mainline games in Mega Man 7! **— DAVID**



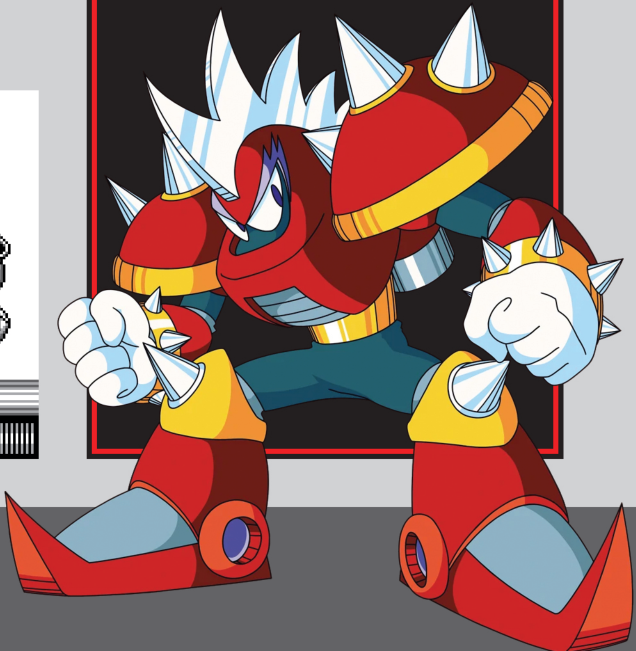
ORIGINAL RELEASE: GAME BOY, DECEMBER 1992 PUBLISHER: CAPCOM DEVELOPER: MINAKUCHI ENGINEERING

PLAYING IT TODAY

We've recently been recommending that our readers do some last-minute shopping in the older eShops before they're shut down, and we can add Mega Man III (and the four other Game Boy Mega Man games) to that list of approved final purchases by way of its waning availability as a 3DS Virtual Console title. Once that $2.99 digital download is no longer offered, your only recourse for ownership of this adventure will be tracking down an original cartridge. And they're currently priced around 60 bucks on eBay for just a loose cart! Maybe Capcom will gather the Game Boy games together for another Legacy Collection someday, but it hasn't happened yet, and sadly doesn't seem like much of a priority.

WHAT A PUNK!

Part of the draw of the Game Boy Mega Man games is not only getting to fight your favorite Robot Masters on the go, but also taking on entirely new characters, such as the second Mega Man Killer, Punk. This buzzsaw bad boy looks like Dr. Wily took a page right out of Dr. Eggman's playbook (something which Sonic himself wasn't too thrilled to see in Worlds Collide), as he uses his spiked shoulderpads to roll into a pointy ball of destruction that spins through the air and along the ground. Unlike the Blue Blur, however, this red rabble-rouser can attack from a distance by throwing spinning buzzsaws known as Screw Crushers! While the Mega Buster is the only weapon that can harm Punk, it follows that Punk's Screw Crusher is the only weapon that can damage the Wily Machine's second form in this game, making it crucial to the fight for everlasting peace!



ORIGINAL RELEASE: GAMECUBE, MARCH 17, 2005 PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: NAMCO

PLAYING IT TODAY

Going back in time to the mid-'00s and playing Donkey Konga or Donkey Konga 2 isn't too tricky, as a trip to eBay or even a local game store that stocks used products would probably provide you with both the game discs and the Bongo controller for a reasonable price. You can play them on either a GameCube or a Wii, too, and goodness knows plenty of those are still around! Playing a copy of Donkey Konga 3 specifically is a bit of a taller order, since all GameCubes were region-locked. NOA really didn't want anyone importing from Japan! It could (and can) still be done, though, with a boot disc like a Freeloader.

REMEMBERING THE DK BONGOS

One of Nintendo's goofiest peripherals ever, the DK Bongos were a literal pair of drums that connected to the GameCube. You'd play Donkey Konga by slapping the left drum to the beat when a yellow drum icon scrolled by on the screen, while a red icon meant a rightside slap was needed. The "burst" icon meant you had to clap! A small microphone would pick up the sound (or else you could tap the side of one of the drums to trigger it too). With just three inputs (four if you count the Start Button), the Bongos were extremely limited. Still, they worked beautifully for the Konga games, and Nintendo even decided to build a whole platformer adventure to use them too: Donkey Kong Jungle Beat! We may never see the likes of the DK Bongos again.

LOST IN UNTRANSLATION DONKEY KONGA 3: TABEHOUDAI! HARU MOGITATE 50 KYOKU

NOA localized the first two Kongas, but not this threequel!

MY BROTHER DAN is one of the best Donkey Konga players on the planet. Or he was, back when the series was still new! His skills are probably a little rusty at this point, but he was once so good at these games that he could play them with one hand tied behind his back. Literally! He'd use just one hand and play both sides of the Bongos, still never missing a beat. It was insane.

So extreme was Dan's dedication to this series that after he mastered Donkey Konga and Donkey Konga 2, I imported the Japan-only Donkey Konga 3 so he could keep the party going just a little while longer. I got it for him as a gift, I believe, and he was surprised to receive it – he hadn't expected to ever play it, since Nintendo didn't officially release it in North America!

I'm sometimes confused about the reasons why Nintendo of America leaves some games in Japan, but for this one I can easily point out three reasons why it never made it to the shelves of a Circuit City or K-Mart.

First of all, Donkey Konga was an extremely niche series already. Guitar Hero had not yet come along to make rhythm games go mainstream in America, so the players who were willing to take a chance on slapping a bongo-shaped specialty GameCube controller while DK grooved along to cover bands' renditions of a handful of popular radio songs were few and far-between for sure. Add to that the fact that the GameCube itself was in third place in sales in that generation, and I'm almost surprised any of this series got localized at all! Donkey Konga 2's Western release must've been a miracle.

Secondly, the timing would have been truly terrible for Donkey Konga 3 to get any kind of a push from NOA. The series' localizations were lagging behind Japan's release dates by a little less than a year, so this game would've hit the West in early 2006 or so. That year was a no man's land for first-party GameCube games! NOA knew the Cube was dead and put all their time into building toward the upcoming Wii launch – literally only three first-party GameCube games debuted in all of 2006 before the Wii went on sale that November.

Finally, licensing all the tracks in rhythm/music titles just has to be a nightmare. Konga 1 and Konga 2 had only about 30 songs apiece, but the big selling point of Donkey Konga 3 in Japan was that it had over 50! Major hits drawn from popular anime series filled a lot of the setlist, too, with songs from Dragon Ball Z, Fullmetal Alchemist, Naruto and many, many more. While putting those into a rhythm game in Japan probably wasn't too terribly tough, navigating through all of the legal turns it would've taken to get them into the States surely just wasn't worth the trouble. And getting new songs to sub in for them was surely judged to be, again, not worth it.

But as understandable as all of that is, it's still a shame that the Konga trilogy was left incomplete in the West! Having one more upbeat party game could've helped raise Nintendo fans' low spirits in early 2006, and I know that Kentucky's resident Donkey Konga legend, one Daniel Thomas, would've excitedly been the first in line to buy a localized release. **– LUCAS**

WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

GRACING THE COVER of the whopping 100th issue of Nintendo Power was, well, who else? Mario was front and center to herald the festivities, including a number of landmark articles – all multiplied by 100, naturally.

We don't normally talk much about the "Player's Pulse" letters section here, but this one deserves special attention. Not only did it show off some photographs and memorable moments of making the magazine from the NP crew, but it also featured the return of Nester to the Power pages! Turns out our boy Nester had been away at college for the last few years, and he had some catching up to do!

Following that came previews of numerous upcoming Nintendo 64 games, including Zelda 64 (still not yet renamed "Ocarina of Time"), Yoshi's Story, Banjo-Kazooie, Bomberman 64, Major League Baseball featuring Ken Griffey Jr., Conker's Quest (still before he had a Bad Fur Day), WCW vs. nWo World Tour, Space Station Silicon Valley, San Francisco Rush: Extreme Racing, Mortal Kombat: Mythologies: Sub-Zero, Duke Nukem 64, NFL Quarterback Club '98, Body Harvest, Top Gear Rally and Quest 64.

Whew! With all those previews, there couldn't have been any room left for regular features, right? Wrong! GoldenEye 007 was back and better than ever, as some changes had been made after the previous issue went to press. In the spirit of this issue, they showed off the 100 best places to ambush opponents in multiplayer mode. Then there was "100 Other Things That Equal 100," "100 Best Codes Ever," "Nintendo Power's 100 Best Games of All Time," "Nintendo Power's 100 All Time Best Scores" in NP Arena and a Player's Poll contest with "100s of Prizes" for "100s of Winners," featuring N64 Game Paks, N64 Controllers, Rumble Paks and NP T-shirts going to 100 winners in each place.

The poster even featured the covers of the first 100 issues! (Huh. And here I thought maybe we were taking the "3" thing a little too far in this issue . . . never mind!)

Closing things out was a Pak Watch headlined by Earthworm Jim 3, with a little game called F-Zero X tucked in somewhere further back.

Things shifted back to normal in NP #101, as Extreme-G took the cover in an effort to take the checkered flag among N64 racing games. Mischief Makers, Mace: The Dark Age, Madden 64 and even games that don't start with "M," like Last Legion UX, Tetrisphere, F1 Pole Position 64 and Aerofighters Assault rounded out the N64 features of this issue.

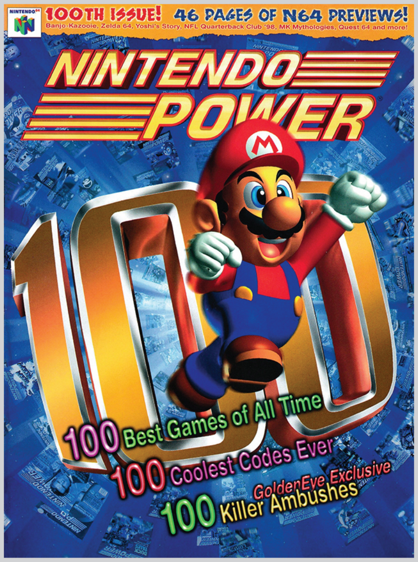
Super Power Players saw a little love this time, too, with Space Invaders, Arkanoid and Timon & Pumbaa's Jungle Games. Portable Power Players got to experience the Tamagotchi craze of the day in their own handheld way, while Donkey Kong Land III adapted an unsung Super NES classic and Mortal Kombat I & II delivered the Game Boy versions of both titles in a one-two Game Pak punch.

The Player's Poll contest this issue whisked the winning Power Player away to Brunswick's World Tournament of Champions to get a private bowling lesson from a pro, plus some bowling gear and a copy of the Super NES game.

And speaking of contests, a few issues ago, the NP crew sought out the Nintendo game of the future – here, we got to see which concept enticed them the most. They haven't released the Nintendo Virtual Dream Machine yet, but we've still got a bit longer to wait before 2064 gets here!

Capping things off in Pak Watch was Diddy Kong Racing with a two-page spread, plus Kirby's Dream Land 3 and more from some of the N64 games we saw in the previous issue. (Sadly, NP #101 featured absolutely zero dalmatians.) **— DAVID**

ISSUE #100: **SEPTEMBER 1997**



ISSUE #101: **OCTOBER 1997**

nintendo power's 100 BEST games of all time

so, you wanna fight about it?

how do you decide the best 100 games of all time?

If you're like us at Nintendo Power, you get a bunch of your gaming friends together and hold a civilized debate, sort of like Roman gladiators having a tea party—it may seem civil on the surface, but we don't recommend turning your back for a lump of sugar. Our 12 debaters, representing every manner of gamer here at Nintendo, nominated their picks for the best games from the libraries of the NES, Game Boy, Super NES, Virtual Boy and N64. (Virtual Boy completely struck out. Go figure.) Once the nominations were in, we opened the floor to illuminated debate. Participants argued vigorously and persuasively for their favorites, ticking off the reasons why they were right and why everyone else obviously had brain damage. Eventually, being red-blooded North Americans, we held a vote, which resulted in the list you find here. So it was democratic decision. You may not agree with every one of our choices, but we stand behind our picks—sometimes very far behind them. If you have a problem with this, take it up with the judge.

1 SUPER MARIO 64

Nintendo—N64—September 1996

So many things are done so well in this game, that it's difficult to a single in on a reason that makes it the best game of all time. Shigeru Miyamoto, the designer of Mario 64, had always wanted to create a game that he described as being like a magical garden full of surprises, excitement, discoveries and danger. The immersive nature of Mario 64 is unrivaled and maybe that's why it was our one and only unanimous choice in the great debate.

2 ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

Nintendo—Super NES—April 1992

Few gamers would argue that A Link to the Past deserves this lofty position, and if they did grouse, we'd give their address to a moblin. Coming in at number two in our voting, Zelda for the Super NES proves that you don't have to be radical to end up on top. Our one question is, why put Zelda in every title in the series when all she ever does is sleep and send occasional telepathic messages? Next time, give credit to the little green guy.

3 TETRIS

Nintendo—Game Boy—June 1989

Surprised? Don't be. Tetris for Game Boy continues to be one of the most played games of all time. Who can forget their first game of Tetris, the fascination of fitting the tetrads together, the growing anxiety as the blocks stack up, and the almost spiritual sense that you get when you line everything up and clear the stack, achieving a zen-like oneness with your Game Boy. Tetris is life. Life is Tetris.

88

4 MARIO KART 64

Nintendo—N64—February 1997

Kart comes in at the top because it is so much fun to play, especially as a multi-player game. Some critics have pointed out that the game isn't revolutionary. We would like to point out to them that games aren't about revolutions, they're about fun. Incredible play control and graphics don't hurt, either.

5 SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

Nintendo—NES—February 1990

With over eight million copies in homes across North America, SMB 3 was the best-selling NES game of all-time. But it wasn't sales figures that got our votes. Miyamoto's game design was at its creative best. In SMB 3, Mario donned a Tanooki (raccoon) suit in order to fly. Weirdness like that has got to be rewarded.

6 SUPER METROID

Nintendo—Super NES—April 1994

The heart of Metroid games has always been the incomparable game control and attacks. We all agree that Super Metroid charted new territory with great moves like the Space Walk, Super Jumps, and Super Dash. And every game should have X-Ray goggles. Period. The graphics remain some of the best ever for 16-bit games.

7 GOLDENEYE

Nintendo—N64—August 1997

There are two antagonistic camps at Nintendo—those who think GoldenEye is the greatest game in history and those who think the first group has been seriously warped by having too much fun shooting each other in the back. The argument goes like this—GoldenEye hasn't been around long enough to prove its staying power, even though no one on the Power staff has slept in about two months because they've been playing GoldenEye. Therefore, it can't be number one. The GoldenEye advocates argue that this is just a clever ruse to get them to go home, at which time the first group will steal their copies of GoldenEye. If nothing else, this debate proves that GoldenEye puts players in a cloak and dagger state of mind.

8 FINAL FANTASY III

Square Soft—Super NES—October 1994

The gaming electorate at Nintendo nearly came to blows during the Great Final Fantasy III versus Final Fantasy II Debate. It came down to an argument about opera, and opera won. In addition to arias, Final Fantasy III had everything you could want—heroes, world-shattering events, magic, mindless evil—plus Interceptor the wonder dog!

9 FINAL FANTASY II

Square Soft—Super NES—November 1991

For all you loyal fans of Final Fantasy II, take this ninth place finish with a grain of salt. So what if it doesn't have an opera scene. Who needs it?

10 STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

Capcom—Super NES—August 1993

Turbo had the best speed, the best moves and the animation was great. We decreed that this remains the tournament fighting game by which all others should be judged. SF II Turbo achieved great game design balance.

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SHOULD IT BE REMADE? SUPER METROID

Some fans are calling for it, while others are loudly opposed.

IS NOTHING SACRED?

No, really, that's not rhetorical. Are there any video games of the past that you feel are so perfect that they are, therefore, untouchable? Should never be revisited. Should never be remade.

Super Metroid seems to be living right in the middle of this debate right now.

We finally got "Metroid 5" last year, as Metroid Dread moved the series' timeline forward from the conclusion of Metroid Fusion after a wait of nearly two decades. Creating Dread was a job that the development team at MercurySteam earned thanks to their hard work on Metroid: Samus Returns, which was a remake of the Game Boy classic Metroid II: Return of Samus. So now, assuming MercurySteam sticks with the series, fans are rightly trying to puzzle out whether they'd do another original sequel next, or if they'd tackle another remake.

And if they tackle another remake, well, 1994's SNES masterpiece Super Metroid (a.k.a. "Metroid 3") is the oldest game in the line that hasn't been remade yet.

So the puzzle pieces are in place to suggest that it *might* happen. But *should* it happen? Or should Super be the one piece of Samus' saga that we just let be?

I participate casually in a handful of video game fan Facebook groups, and someone posted recently that he didn't like Super Metroid. I (jokingly) told him that if he didn't like Super Metroid, then he wasn't allowed to be a video game fan any more. He should take up some other hobby instead. (I suggested beekeeping.)

Honestly, even with its age, I still think this is almost a perfect video game. It still controls beautifully. Its atmosphere is still haunting. Its music is still brilliant.

Super Metroid has also become such a centerpiece of the speedrunning community in its original SNES form – and in various modded versions – that it's hard to wrap my head around it ever being totally redone. I think this game would be one that could easily go down in history with its reputation entirely intact if it was never touched again, but just kept on being ported as-is to newer generations of hardware.

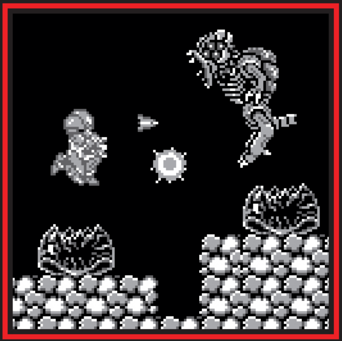
. . . And yet. I do have to concede that I *can* also envision what a Super Metroid remake could look and feel like now that Metroid Dread has come and gone. MercurySteam did such a brilliant job with that long-awaited sequel through its visuals and the responsiveness of its controls – taking that style and gameplay back in time and applying it to the original Metroid planet, Zebes, would be something I'd be excited to see. Remaking Super would also likely mean a much better soundtrack! Dread's music was unmemorable, except for the parts that actually were just taken straight out of Super and reused. Maybe MercurySteam's musicians would do better with the whole Super soundtrack as a baseline, and not having to do anything from scratch.

Some pieces might feel too similar – Dread just had a big Kraid boss battle, again lifted largely from Super, and its Central Units were all riffs on Mother Brain – but plenty of parts could still feel fresh, like Maridia and the Wrecked Ship. And maybe Zebes' corridors would be remixed enough to accommodate Dread's newer Speed Booster techniques?

Honestly, I can't make up my mind either way. If it happens, I won't be too surprised. But if it doesn't, the galaxy would still remain at peace. **– LUCAS**

BEFORE & AFTER: THE PREVIOUS METROID REMAKES

While Super Metroid holds up perfectly well to this day, its predecessors were made much more accessible through their remakes. 1987's NES Metroid inspired 2004's Metroid: Zero Mission for Game Boy Advance, and it gorgeously upgraded the graphics, made exploration much easier with in-game maps and guidance and extended the story with a whole new chapter beyond the point where the NES original ended. Just five years ago, the 3DS got Metroid: Samus Returns, built upon the foundation of 1991's Metroid: Return of Samus from the Game Boy. The limitations of that old monochrome hardware made it tough to play that part of Samus' story even when it was brand-new, so having a brighter retelling of that tale was welcome.



INTERVIEW

KENJI SATO

Getting to know one of the creative forces behind River City Saga: Three Kingdoms!

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
1981 in Japan

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Director at Arc System Works

INTERVIEW & SPRITE ART BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NF: What is the game that got you most excited about joining the video game industry?
KENJI: I'd have to say Chrono Trigger for the SNES.

What were the first games you ever worked on, and what was it like to work on them?
The first game I worked on was Standard Daisenryaku: Dengekisen *[Standard Grand Strategy: Blitzkrieg]* for the PlayStation 2. At that time I was only doing 3D modeling. I didn't like that sort of simulation game, really. However, once I got into dealing with all the stats and comparing weapons it became one of my favorite genres.

What was your first exposure to the Kunio-kun series, and what made it stand out to you?
It had a really joyful, fun image to me. Especially Downtown Nekketsu Koushinkyoku: Soreyuke Daiundoukai *[Downtown Nekketsu March Super-Awesome Field Day!]*. The fact that the courses would be in people's houses made me laugh like crazy when I was a kid.

Rumor has it that the Kunio-kun/ Double Dragon series was influenced by the real-life high school misadventures of their creator, Yoshihisa Kishimoto, who apparently had more than his fair share of run-ins with Bousouzoku (Japanese motorcycle gangs) and Yankii (street-fighting delinquents). Have you had any personal experiences with real-life hot-blooded tough guys too?
People in our generation dealt with a lot of fights at the arcade, so for us "video games" and "fighting" have strong associations.

The Three Kingdoms era of history has been a popular setting for games and other media for Japanese audiences for a long time. When talking to Westerners who didn't grow up with these legendary stories, how do you explain what makes them special?
In Japan, "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" is kind of like what "King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table" is to the West. It contains historical facts made into different episodes and brought together to make a beautiful story that has been told to so many people. I think one of the things Japanese people like the most about it might be the episodes that are themed around "the weak facing up to the strong."

The classic "8-bit sprite" of Kunio (first seen in the West in River City Ransom) has proven to be a timelessly charming design, surviving (with some adaptations) all the way up into your new game. What is it about the little guy that makes him so relatable?
Despite the fact that pixel art is a very old graphical style, the fact that it is so effective at displaying a wide range of expressions, and that you can tell exactly what those expressions mean instantaneously, is very charming. I think the fact that you can get so much out of just a few pixels is why people all over the world are still interested in pixel art.

What features in River City Saga: Three Kingdoms are you most excited for players to experience?
We added in a "China Heroes" mode that looks like a remake of an old-school sidescrolling beat-'em-up. *[And it includes a huge roster of playable characters, including Kyoko and Misako from River City Girls.]* I'm more happy about that being played than I am about people playing our story mode!

The Kunio-series has gone to the fields of ancient warfare, soccer tournaments, puzzle games and even traveled through time. Is there anywhere you think the series would ever refuse to go?
We'd like to take on anything the fans want us to.

Likewise, if you were tasked to introduce Kunio into a whole new genre that he's never touched before, where would you take him and why?
I'm interested in current popular genres, like battle royale games and roguelikes. Maybe even a digital card game?

Expanding on that question, if you could make a game using any of Nintendo's characters, and you had an unlimited budget and creative freedom, which characters would you choose and what would you make?
I'd love a game where you play as a Boo and play pranks on other Mario characters!

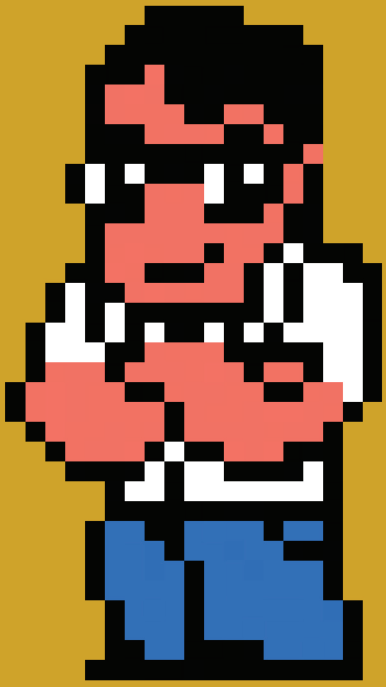
Finally, if you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?
I'd love to become a half-Vulcan and have adventures in outer space. Live long and prosper! NF

THE ENDURING APPEAL OF RIVER CITY'S 8-BIT SPRITE STYLE

Like many visuals that have remained emblematic through multiple generations, the classic River City sprites were born out of necessity. It started with a challenge: How can you fit the buff, beefy boys of Renegade (the arcade originator of the series) into an NES cartridge? In short, you couldn't. Those knuckle-dusting punk punchers needed to be shrunk down in a big way if they were ever going to fit on an 8-bit cart. And they soon learned that smaller was better! River City Ransom, the first game in the series designed from the ground up for home consoles, gave its cast even bigger heads and shorter limbs, and it went on to be the biggest game in the franchise yet.

River City had found its iconic look, but the people making it didn't know that yet. The 16-bit River City titles went back to more realistic bodies, and that choice led to the death of both the series and Technos, its publisher. Eventually the brand was reborn at Arc Systems Works, and they were wise to make the bulk of their River City revamps in the old-school style that was a proven crowd-pleaser! It's so easy to relate to! Anyone can see themselves in these cute little troublemakers.

Just as Minecraft's Steve and the original Mega Man sprite are timelessly appealing, design simplicity is the proven way to win on the streets of River City.



INTERVIEW TRANSLATION BY GZW

BY MATTHEW TARANTO

REVIEWS

The artwork below was a team effort! Credits include Noah by **@WingedKoro**, Mio by **@RaymirDoo**, Lanz by **@DaxerAivi**, Sena by **@HiKrispy**, Eunie by **@JohnnyLockson** and Taion by **@Animated_E**. Check out each of their individual Twitter profiles for more examples of their excellent illustrations!

Six heroes join forces . . . to fuse into three bigger heroes? Let's start unpacking the puzzle of **Xenoblade Chronicles 3** in Part 1 of our full review!

Strength in Numbers

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 3

WHEN YOU PLAY a lot of long JRPGs like I do, there's a lot you can tell after reaching the 30-hour mark. One of the main things: If it's a game you're going to finish in 50 hours because you're ready to be done, or in 100 hours because you want to see all it has to offer.

I can confirm that Xenoblade Chronicles 3 is in the latter category.

The latest entry in Monolith Soft's Xenoblade series landed on the Switch on July 29. Like its predecessors, it has no shortage of content to dive into, but it's the quality of its content that makes it stand out. That quality is across the board, from main story and combat to sidequests and exploration.

XC3 takes place in Aionios, a world ravaged by a war between the nations of Keves and Agnus. In this world, people only have 10 years to live. They spend most of it fighting and are often killed before they even reach that milestone. It's a bleak premise, but rest assured that XC3 balances out those dark themes with plenty of levity, thanks to its cast.

The main party of six: Noah, Eunie, Lanz, Mio, Taion and Sena, includes three soldiers from Keves and three from Agnus. The group starts out fighting each other, but are soon forced to work together after becoming enemies of both nations.

At first, their interactions are as you would expect from people who've been trained to kill each other, but they eventually warm up to one another. The game's writing makes this transition really believable. They don't go from enemies to best friends right away. They have arguments and moments of misunderstanding, but you can also see the bonds among them forming as they proceed toward their goal. The bond between primary protagonists Noah and Mio, who both serve as off-seers (paying last respects to fallen soldiers of their respective armies) is especially sweet.

Not to mention that XC3 has some of the best NPCs of the series, including Riku and Manana, the two Nopon who accompany the main party. They've put a smile on my face in every scene they've been in!

As for the story itself, I'm about halfway through it. While I don't want to give much away, I will say the game does a good job of integrating the main cast of six in meaningful ways, and it's already had several of the juicy twists and turns fans have come to expect from Xenoblade narratives. Also, the main story cutscenes are so well done visually and cinematically, and the music is incredible. Every time a major story event unfolds it's a spectacle to watch.

Of course, there are plenty of ways to deviate from the main story if you so choose. Aionios is a vast open world divided into regions, and it's no small task to explore it all. It includes locales from giant plains and mountains to deserts and underground tunnels.

The sights are beautiful at times, but during exploration and optional scenes you come across, environments and characters look blurry. I could tell that less time was spent optimizing these sections compared to the main story content. That's understandable, but there was a noticeably large difference in quality.

These regions have plenty to find while exploring, including treasure, hidden areas, fallen soldiers to send off via Noah and Mio's off-seer abilities, quests, etc. There were times when I was playing that I'd just wander around filling out a region's map because it felt rewarding, and I wanted to see all it had to offer.

Swaths of monsters big, small and menacing also fill up the map, and that's where XC3's intricate combat system takes center stage.

Compared to previous games, XC3's combat is the series' most ambitious, and it makes the experience both overwhelming and exciting. It took me a little while to get used to controlling the six party members and to keep track of everything happening on the screen during combat. There's also a vast amount of mechanics to learn. Thankfully, XC3 has tutorials and training drills in its menu to help in that process. The combat system brings back components from XC1 and 2, and adds new offerings to the mix. Once you're comfortable with it, it's the best the series has ever had!

Let's start with the old: automatic attacks, Arts and combos, such as Break/Topple/Daze and Break/Topple/Launch/Smash, return. They work similarly to past games, and ally A.I. is pretty sharp when pulling them off – after initiating or continuing a combo, party members usually follow suit quickly down the line to complete it.

Now to the new stuff, and there's quite a lot! XC3's combat features three roles – Attacker, Defender and Healer – and within each of those are multiple classes with their own unique combination of Arts.

Each main party member starts out as a specific class, but they can take on new ones as you play. This opens up a host of possibilities in terms of party configurations and Fusion Arts, another new offering. Fusion Arts are a combination of two Arts from different classes, and when activated, they produce the effects of both at the same time.

For example, Noah starts out as a Swordfighter, which is a basic high-damage offensive class. After he ranked up that class fully, I equipped him with Taion's Tactician class and created a Fusion Art, so Noah could then debuff and damage an enemy at the same time. It's amazing how many combinations you can make!

Another addition to combat comes in the new Ouroboros forms. Within the six party members, three pairs (Noah & Mio, Lanz & Sena and Eunie & Taion) can fuse together to become Ouroboros: large armored forms that wield powerful Arts and easily turn the tide in battle. You can only use them for a limited time, but they add another strategic layer into the system and have some interesting story ramifications at the same time.

XC3 also integrates some of its best sidequest content within its combat system via Hero Quests. As you progress in the main story and explore, you'll encounter characters called Heroes who will join your party after completing a quest line and allowing party members to learn their class. You can also select one Hero to fight with the main party, though they aren't controllable.

Storywise, these quests are on the same level as the main narrative, and they show you more about the world and society of Aionios. They also teach you more about the backstories of the main party. If you're playing or plan to play XC3, do not skip the Heroes!

With so much content available, some aspects of XC3 could've been left on the cutting room floor. The class system is a lot to manage with six characters on its own, but you also have accessories, gems to craft and equip, a cooking mechanic and item-gathering quests. I'm sure there are players who enjoy these activities, but I didn't want to invest much time into them compared to everything else the game has to offer.

Performance-wise, XC3 holds up well. I've experienced one crash so far, while equipping characters in the menu. The game looks good in TV and Handheld Modes, and the handheld visuals are a big improvement from XC2's. Monolith Soft has once again proved they are wizards with the Switch's hardware, despite some of its limitations.

While this is a review in progress, I've already seen enough of XC3 to know it will be one of the top RPG experiences of the year, and on the Switch as a whole. I'm so excited to experience everything else that's still to come – look for my final thoughts in our next issue! **– MAGGIE**

IN PROGRESS

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: MONOLITH SOFT
RATING: T

Stalk in the Dark and Fight in the Streets

CAPCOM FIGHTING COLLECTION

"CAPCOM CAN'T COUNT to 3." That's what frustrated Street Fighter fans used to say between 1991 and 1997, the six-and-a-half-year span between the release of the second and third games in the series. Impatient loyalists hated this break between numbered titles in the franchise, but for Capcom, it was an amazing time for creativity and risk taking.

The bulk of the games in this new Capcom Fighting Collection come from that era, and they've held up incredibly well. Darkstalkers, Cyberbots, Super Gem Fighter and Red Earth felt really special back in the day, and they stand out even more now. Big budget, sprite-based 2D fighting games are rarer than ever, so getting nine of them (plus a puzzle game) all for $40 feels like getting a bag of gold for the price of a Happy Meal.

Darkstalkers games make up half of this compilation, and that majority stake is much deserved. At the time, these games stood in as the real follow-up to Street Fighter 2, adding mechanics like air dashing, block canceling and easy-to-dial-in chain combos. But it's the completely over-the-top cast of monsters and miscreants on the roster that makes these games truly memorable! Many of them, like Morrigan the succubus, are still famous in the FGC to this day, despite the fact that the series came to an end back in 1997.

The endpoints to the Darkstalkers franchise are actually the low points here. Released simultaneously in Japanese arcades 25 years ago, Vampire Savior 2 and Vampire Hunter 2 are essentially the same game with slightly different rosters. It's cool to see them finally released in the West, but their lack of completeness make them more oddities than must-haves. It would have been much better to include the console-only Vampire Savior: EX Edition instead, as it was the only version of the game to include every character in the series.

The same goes for the version of Cyberbots in the collection. This giant mech battle is still amazing: It boasts a surprisingly detailed story, unique limb-detaching mechanics, huge set-pieces and striking, stop-motion style animation. But it's missing Cyber Akuma, the special Street Fighter crossover character from the Saturn version.

If it seems unfair to criticize this bundle for not including superior console ports of arcade originals, hear me out. Hyper Street Fighter 2, the one SF game in this package, *is* an enhanced console port of Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo that includes every iteration of every character from those games. So, if Capcom could do it for Street Fighter, why not for Darkstalkers and Cyberbots?

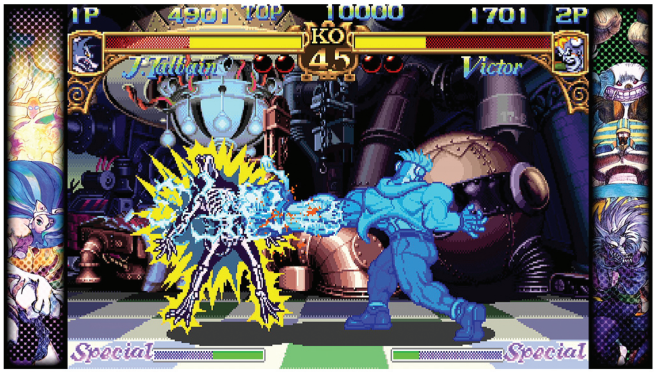
These slightly lacking choices give Red Earth a chance at being the best game on this setlist. This is the first time the game has ever made it to consoles, in part because it was too beautiful for home hardware to handle back in the day. It also bucks trends in big ways, featuring only four playable characters, but eight overpowered, unplayable bosses. With three endings and a RPG-style leveling system, Red Earth is the rare fighter that you'll want to play alone for hours on end.

Gem Fighter and Puzzle Fighter are super-deformed crossovers that work to round out the other titles. The two look similar, but one's a fighter that features mechanics from Street Fighter, Darkstalkers and Red Earth, and Puzzle Fighter is a color-matching puzzler that's still played competitively to this day. Getting to go online with all of these titles is a real treat, though there are a surprisingly low number of bonus features here compared to 2017's similar Street Fighter collection.

Despite a few stumbles, this collection is a must-have for 2D graphics fans in general, and fighting game fans in particular. **— JONATHAN**

9.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RATING: T



It's About Time!

LIVE A LIVE

DESPITE IT BEING only a modest seller in Japan back in 1994, and despite the fact that it never made it overseas before now, LIVE A LIVE has been a major influence on modern RPGs such as Undertale, as well as later Square Enix titles like Octopath Traveler. It's also been a huge part of the careers of many of Square Enix's most celebrated producers and composers, and now, with this HD-2D remake, those talents are shining brighter than ever before.

As someone who played the fan-translated 16-bit original, there were a lot of quality-of-life changes that were made for the better – an updated U.I. featuring attack type/element icons in battle, gauges to show movement and charge time and an expanded inventory screen. But these pale in comparison to the *huge* impact that the new HD-2D graphics and remastered music have on the atmosphere, especially in establishing shots such as the introduction of Ode Iou's keep (seen at the bottom right below) in Oboromaru's chapter, or the close-ups of scattered cargo containers in the Cogito Ergo Sum's cargo bay during Cube's chapter. Even the battle maps have gotten a visual upgrade to make the movement grid less obvious.

The remastered music is, overall, a huge improvement over the original, and Yoko Shimomura even added some traditional instruments to the mix in chapters such as the Earthen Heart Shifu's. Megalomania, the boss battle theme, was a banger then, and is even more of a banger now.

Having the opportunity to recruit different characters and take specific actions in stories like Sundown's and Oboromaru's really brings out the replay value – I can easily see speed-runners trying to go for pacifist runs or genocide runs in Oboromaru's chapter – and there are other interesting secrets to discover in other chapters. Going through the entire game will probably take you about 25-30 hours, with some of the starting chapters a little longer – or a little easier – than others. Also, for those who have played the original, there is an extra, meaningful surprise waiting for you at the "golden" ending that was well worth the effort it took to get there.

Gameplay-wise, my first major gripe is the fact that most of the Game Over sequences are unskippable cutscenes. Some of them are brief (Pogo's), but others dragged on and got annoying to see multiple times (Oboromaru's). My second major gripe is that the game's final chapter, which involves a lot of travel between far-flung corners of the map, could have used a fast travel system or an item or spell to reduce enemy encounters – it's great if you're trying to level someone up, but your characters only learn new techniques up to a point, and then they're pretty much set for the rest of the adventure.

There was only one major issue I had with the localization – if you know Japanese, the ending to Pogo's chapter hits a little differently. (It's the only chapter without an English dub, since you can't really translate "Caveman Grunt" into English.) The English voice acting was primarily well done, although I thought the accent of The Prisoner in Oboromaru's chapter was a little too over the top, and some of the kids – especially one poor soul named Watanabe you run into an awful lot – sounded way too much like adults trying too hard. My biggest issue with the writing was in Oersted's chapter, where everyone spoke very formal Shakespearean English that came across as very dense and hard to understand.

Square Enix has once again dipped into their back catalog to unearth a buried treasure, and we have both Octopath Traveler and Triangle Strategy to thank for that. Hopefully this means that there's going to be more! If you're a fan of RPGs from the 16-bit era, or if you're looking for something that doesn't require a huge time investment, LIVE A LIVE is one RPG you won't want to miss, and not just because it was a stepping stone to some of the classics of that era. It's a unique storytelling experience!
– REBECCA

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX
RATING: T

Three Paths to Follow Once More

FIRE EMBLEM WARRIORS: THREE HOPES

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: TEAM NINJA & OMEGA FORCE RATING: T

I TOOK THE plunge into the world of Fire Emblem: Three Houses last year, and I enjoyed every minute of it – so I was excited to hear that it was getting a spinoff in the form of Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes! I was initially hesitant, since my only Musou experience was with the demos of the Hyrule Warriors games, but once I had the opportunity to see the trailers, I knew this would be a Day 1 purchase for me, and I haven't regretted it.

While it's helpful to have played Three Houses beforehand, Three Hopes gets everyone up to speed right away on the world of Fódlan and the three groups of classmates – Black Eagles, Blue Lions and Golden Deer – that you can choose to align yourself with. Three Hopes' overall story asks, "What if someone else had saved Edelgard, Claude and Dimitri one dark night in the forest outside Remire Village?"

The main player character, Shez, is a young mercenary whose band is wiped out by Jeralt's Mercenaries, which include a young man or woman known as the Ashen Demon. When Shez confronts the Ashen Demon, it awakens another entity living within them: Arval, an amnesiac, childlike figure who allows Shez to transform into a more powerful combined form, complete with a manifested sword that allows them to dual-wield. (Those who played Three Houses will immediately see the parallels here, and those questions will only get more and more numerous as time goes by.)

Events start to diverge from the original Three Houses story almost immediately, with Edelgard cleaning the Adrestian Empire of corruption from within, Claude dealing with threats both within and without the Leicester Alliance and Dimitri unraveling the truth of Faerghus' greatest tragedy. Throughout it all, Shez balances their duties to their leader and fellow soldiers with their vow to defeat the Ashen Demon and learn more about themself in the process.

Many of Fire Emblem's (and Three Houses') mechanics have been recreated in Three Hopes, but the most important one is the return of the Weapon Triangle. There are six main weapon types divided into two groups: swords, spears and axes in one, and bows, tomes and knuckles for the other. Enemy units are marked with blue and red icons showing degrees of effectiveness and weakness against your currently active unit, allowing you to plan out quick, targeted attacks.

It took me a little while to get used to the control scheme – every button on the Pro Controller has its use – but after a few battles, I was leading my units, switching between them and giving orders like second nature.

Like all modern Fire Emblems, there are different difficulty levels, as well as the Casual and Classic styles of play. (I played Casual for the purpose of this review.) The only combat system I didn't utilize was the Adjutant system, which I thought was unnecessary since you're effectively fighting one party member down for a small bonus to another's actions.

The best part about combat: It's fun! I've always been the type of person who impulsively runs into action, and being able to hack and slash my way through hordes of enemy soldiers, juggling them up into the air with various spells and swordwork before they hit the ground, is so entertaining. Everyone has an innate skill that adds a little extra oomph to their attacks as well.

Although supports and relationships don't play the same role as in Three Houses, you can take fellow party members on expeditions, which expand on Three Houses' tea parties with more conversation topics. While there are opportunities for gift giving, I didn't think they fit in with the whole atmosphere of war. There are plenty of chances for character development in base camp, with training allowing you to raise character levels with gold as well, so no one's left behind.

8.0

The only issue I had with base camp was repetitive dialogue from the shopkeepers, especially when you have to buy or unload a bunch of extra items or materials, or unlock extra character skills!

While all the Garreg Mach students from Three Houses are playable – including the Ashen Wolves quartet – many characters who were NPCs have been promoted to playable, such as Felix's father Rodrigue in the Azure Gleam storyline. Another playable character who's completely new in Three Hopes is Holst Goneril, Hilda's older brother, who is playable in the Golden Wildfire storyline. Many of the other new NPCs you encounter are fathers of major characters, and a lot of the storyline deals with the relationships between them and their sons and daughters, especially regarding matters of succession.

However, there are a lot of interesting NPCs that still retain their NPC status from Three Houses, like Nader and Judith in Golden Wildfire and the Adrestian Empire generals in Crimson Blaze. I hope that if any DLC packages are released, we'll see a lot more family dynamic stories, some more family members and hopefully some more promotions to playable characters!

Like Three Houses, it will take multiple playthroughs to experience and understand the entire story, but there's also a turning point in each playthrough where your actions determine the ending. In my first playthrough, I reached that turning point and could only watch in shock as I was shown the consequences of my actions – it gave me something to reflect upon when I finally managed to finish the storyline. However, while there is a way to prevent those events from happening, it's not obvious, and will require some trial and error to achieve. Some of the paralogues take a bit too much work and strategy to unlock as well.

Three Houses was an excellent choice to adapt into a Musou, and for my first full experience with the genre, I thoroughly enjoyed it. Seeing my favorite characters in a new light was a treat, and I felt a tremendous sense of accomplishment at achieving the "golden" ending after a huge time investment. This is a can't-miss title for FE3H fans wanting to see more of their favorite students! **— REBECCA**

Half Snacks, Half Bugs, All Delicious!

BUGSNAX

THEY SAY THAT "you are what you eat." If that's the case, then you should probably never pay a visit to Snaktooth Island. There, the only foods available are the local creatures known as Bugsnax – and eating any of them literally will change your body to match whatever you just scarfed down!

You might end up with a hot dog poking out of your head. Your ear might get transformed into an actual ear of corn. You could be left to go through life with a cinnamon roll where your leg used to be, or an arm swapped out for an orange slice.

Luckily, the locals seem to like it! In this game, it's your job to explore this wild island, track down the scattered citizens of its central town and help them with various requests – almost all of which involve catching different Bugsnax and feeding them to the NPCs so that their bodies will transform in certain ways. One guy wants his legs shapeshifted into popsicles so that he can more comfortably walk across hot desert sands. Another wants a strawberry for a hand. Seems weird to me, but who am I to judge?

But while that child-friendly body horror is a part of the package, the real stars of the show here are the Bugsnax themselves. This is the most creative and colorful cast of catchable creatures I've seen outside of the Pokémon series. Nearly all of them are some kind of snack food made into a living thing and given some goofy pun for a name, like the French fry spider called Fryder or the crab/apple named Crapple. There are Banoppers and Big Bopsicles and BBQ Bungers. It's a smorgasbord!

. . . If you can catch them, that is. The core gameplay involves venturing into the wilds of the island, exploring from a first-person perspective and then using various tools in order to snag the Snax. The easiest targets will fall prey to your simple Snak Trap, a kind of remote-controlled umbrella that you set up somewhere, then back off and wait for a creature to crawl underneath – then you snap it shut with a quick button press to nab 'em.

Most of the Bugsnax require more complicated approaches to collect, though, and it ends up being a whole series of puzzles to solve. Do you need to lure your target out of hiding by splashing its favorite kind of sauce on the ground nearby with your slingshot, or topple them with your handy tripwire? Each correct process is most often fun to figure out, but a few of these critters did seem to be a little too elusive.

What's more, while nearly everything about Bugsnax seems built to appeal to kids, I'd worry about the youngest gamers being able to deal with the complexity of its controls. You frequently have to swap between tools with only a few seconds to spare, and each tool in your arsenal activates with a different set of button presses on your controller. It's a lot to juggle, and as such this kid-appealing game is better played as a "grown-up plays, kids sit and watch" game.

It's worked wonderfully well for us when played like that. All of my kids have enjoyed being backseat drivers, telling me where to go next and which Bugsnax to try to attack. The biggest chuckles have come from the scenes where NPCs get their bodies changed by eating the captured Bugsnax: I just let the children take the reins there and decide whether, for example, Wambus Troubleham should get a watermelon for a nose.

A note on content: Bugsnax first launched on PC and PlayStation 4 & 5 in November 2020, so Switch players have had to wait a little while to get it. But the delay did let the developers complete the free "Isle of Bigsnax" expansion, and it's included here from the start. Also, Fangamer scored the exclusive for the physical cartridge version, so visit them if you'd like to own the game tangibly. And check out their related merch, too, like their cute plush Strabby! **– LUCAS**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: YOUNG HORSES RATING: E10+

ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the last two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Alex Kidd in Miracle World DX	7.5	David	#54
Ary and the Secret of Seasons	6.0	Lucas	#49
Atelier Ryza 2: Lost Legends & the Secret Fairy	8.0	Maggie	#51
Atelier Sophie 2: The Alchemist of the Mysterious Dream	8.0	Maggie	#59
Bakugan: Champions of Vestroia	6.5	Lucas	#51
Balan Wonderworld	5.0	Lucas	#52
Big Brain Academy: Brain vs. Brain	8.0	Kris	#58
Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night	7.5	Tony	#48
Blue Reflection: Second Light	8.5	Maggie	#57
Bravely Default II	9.0	Nadia	#52
Catherine: Full Body	8.5	Jonathan	#49
Clubhouse Games: 51 Worldwide Classics	8.5	Lucas	#48
Cobra Kai: The Karate Kid Saga Continues	6.5	Kris	#50
Crash Bandicoot 4: It's About Time!	8.5	David	#52
Cris Tales	6.5	Maggie	#57
Cruis'n Blast	8.0	David	#56
DC Super Hero Girls: Teen Power	7.0	Kris	#53
Deadly Premonition 2: A Blessing in Disguise	7.0	Jonathan	#49
Doki Doki Literature Club Plus!	8.5	Rebecca	#55
Dragon Ball Z: Kakarot	6.0	Kris	#56
G.I. Joe: Operation Blackout	6.5	Lucas	#54
Hot Wheels Unleashed	7.5	Lucas	#56
Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity	8.5	Tony	#50
John Wick Hex	7.5	Chris	#51
Kingdom Hearts: Melody of Memory	7.0	Tony	#50
Kirby and the Forgotten Land	10	Lucas	#59
LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga	9.0	Thor	#59
Mario Golf: Super Rush	9.0	Lucas	#54
Mario Kart Live: Home Circuit	9.5	Lucas	#49
Mario Party Superstars	8.5	Lucas	#57
Mario Strikers: Battle League	7.5	Lucas	#60
Metroid Dread	9.0	Tony	#56
Miitopia	7.5	Brett	#53
MLB The Show 22	8.5	Dan	#59
Monster Hunter Rise	9.0	Lucas	#52
Monster Hunter Stories 2: Wings of Ruin	9.0	Maggie	#54
NEO: The World Ends with You	8.0	Rebecca	#55
NERF Legends	4.0	Lucas	#57
New Pokémon Snap	9.0	Lucas	#53
Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom – Prince's Edition	8.5	Brett	#56
Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl	7.5	Brett	#56
Nickelodeon Kart Racers 2: Grand Prix	7.0	David	#50
No More Heroes III	9.5	Jonathan	#55
Pac-Man Museum+	8.5	Kris	#60
Paper Mario: The Origami King	8.5	Brett	#48
Paw Patrol Mighty Pups: Save Adventure Bay!	8.5	Lucas	#51
Persona 5 Strikers	9.0	Maggie	#52
Pikmin 3 Deluxe	9.5	Lucas	#50
Pokémon Brilliant Diamond	6.5	Rebecca	#57
Pokémon Legends: Arceus	9.0	Lucas	#58
Pokémon Shining Pearl	6.0	Lucas	#57
Puyo Puyo Tetris 2	8.5	Rebecca	#50
R-Type Final 2	7.5	Jonathan	#53
Record of Lodoss War: Deedlit in Wonder Labyrinth	8.0	Jonathan	#60
Rune Factory 5	7.5	Maggie	#59
Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin	8.5	Lucas	#50
Shadowverse: Champion's Battle	8.0	Maggie	#55
Shin Megami Tensei V	8.0	Meghan	#57
Sonic Colors: Ultimate	5.0	Kris	#58
Story of Seasons: Friends of Mineral Town	7.5	Rebecca	#48
Story of Seasons: Pioneers of Olive Town	6.5	Rebecca	#53
Super Mario 3D All-Stars	7.0	Lucas	#49
Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury	10	Lucas	#51
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Mania	8.5	David	#56
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge	10	Lucas	#60
The Caligula Effect 2	8.0	Maggie	#58
The Great Ace Attorney Chronicles	9.0	Rebecca	#54
The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel III	9.0	Maggie	#49
The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel IV	9.0	Maggie	#52
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword HD	9.0	Lucas	#54
Transformers: Battlegrounds	7.5	Lucas	#54
Triangle Strategy	9.0	Nadia	#59
WarioWare: Get It Together!	7.5	Rebecca	#56
World's End Club	6.5	Kris	#55
Xenoblade Chronicles: Definitive Edition	10	Lucas	#48
Ys IX: Monstrum Nox	9.0	Lucas	#55

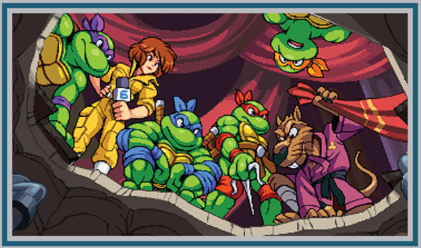
SECOND OPINION
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SHREDDER'S REVENGE

TO SAY I had high expectations for this game would certainly be an understatement. I cut my teeth on TMNT II on NES, and my favorite is Turtles in Time. In fact, the Shredder battle in that game may still be my favorite boss fight of all time. It was so innovative and fun! (That's why I was thrilled to see a modern take on that same boss fight in this new game.)

I love how you can now choose how to toss your enemies with a direction, and the added moves and charge attacks felt like a natural progression, even if it was 30 years in the making! The levels are fun and creative, and it was awesome seeing all the side characters that were largely ignored in the earlier games. I mean, the Neutrinos?! Those are for super fans!

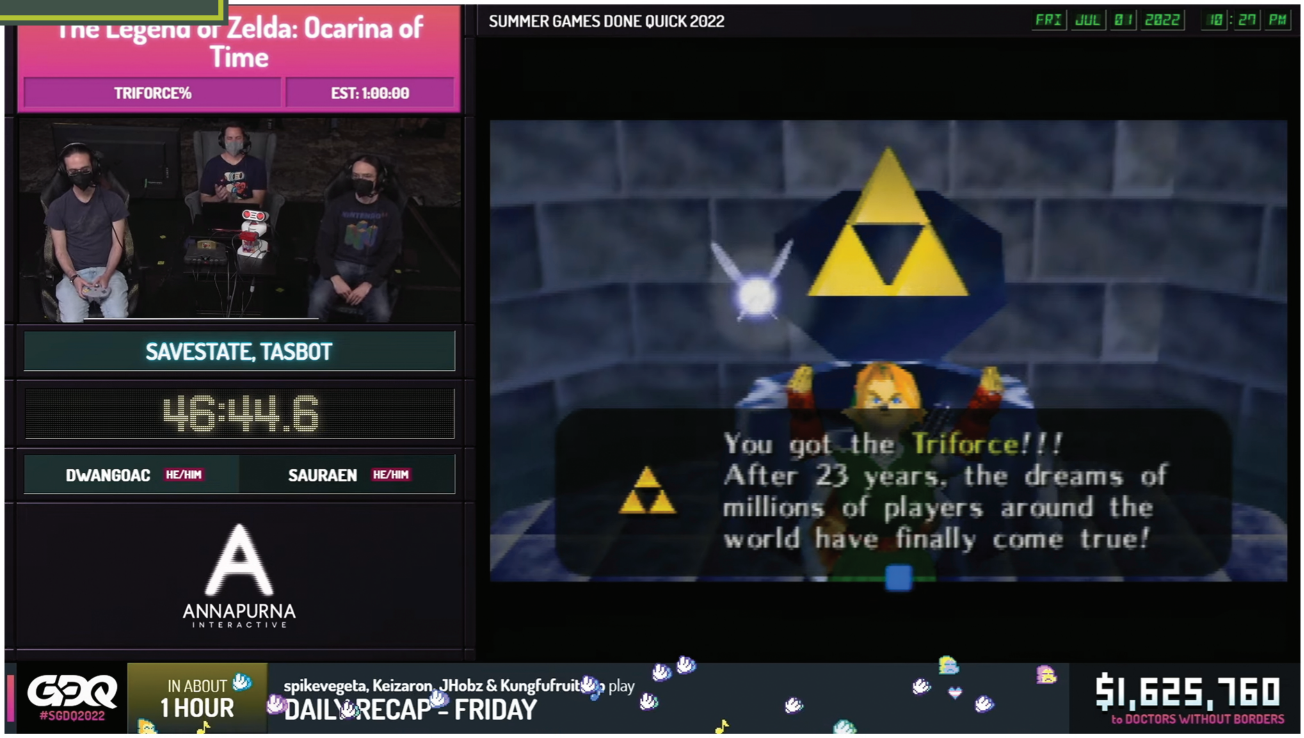
The art style is perfect, and the animation is stunning. The boss battles are just as outrageous as the originals, but they seem a bit harder and . . . less fair? Some of the attacks seem impossible to dodge, and bosses tend to cheese those attacks to a ridiculous degree. I also didn't enjoy the music as much as past entries, but some themes were recognizable and nostalgic. The biggest surprise is the amount of playable characters and having six on the screen at once! And playable April, Splinter and Casey? Finally!

I would have loved more characters, but I'm just happy it was made and made so well. My whole family, even the smalls, love the game, and it's great to all play together! HIGHLY recommended! **— BRETT**



10 LUCAS

9.0 BRETT



SPEEDRUNNING & GAME MODDING

The Triforce has Finally Been Found!

Once dismissed as an urban legend, the most legendary Legend of Zelda item has been acquired in Ocarina of Time at long last!

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE.

Around a quarter century or so ago, video game magazines like Nintendo Power and early gaming websites like N64.com had Zelda fans salivating with early screenshots of the game that would ultimately come to be known as The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time. But, in the few years before its final release, it was most commonly just called "Zelda 64" – and nobody really knew exactly what its adventure would contain.

Including, apparently, Nintendo's designers themselves! Ocarina of Time took shape slowly, with some story changes and gameplay tweaks not getting locked into place until quite late in its development cycle. That means that those early screenshots online and in magazines often showcased settings, moments and items that never made the final cut!

The most infamous of these images pictured Link acquiring the legendary Triforce. The three golden triangles hovered in front of him, having been released from a treasure chest at his feet. It seemed like a totally reasonable scene to expect in the game – acquiring the Triforce had been part of Link's quest in three prior Zeldas – so getting an early glimpse wasn't too much of a spoiler.

. . . Except that scene never happened! By the time Ocarina of Time was finished, Nintendo had axed that moment from the narrative. The Triforce only ended up appearing in cutscenes.

That didn't stop diehard fans from trying to find it, though! Like the quest to locate Luigi hiding somewhere in Super Mario 64, some Ocarina of Time players were convinced that the Triforce *could* be found, deep in the game. The ultimate secret.

Decades later, it's still never been found . . . by traditional means. But it has at last been acquired via a totally untraditional technique!

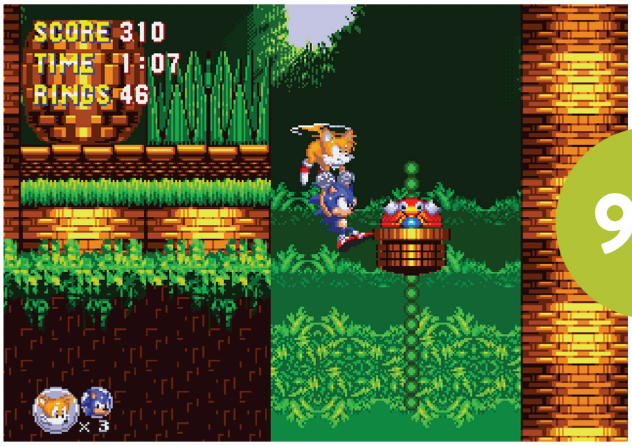
A team of dedicated modders and speedrunners came together to make the impossible possible, and they showcased the results of years of effort at the recent Summer Games Done Quick event. Using an incredibly precise set of movements of Link in the game's opening area of Kokiri Forest, talented speedrunners are able to trick the game into letting them inject and run their own arbitrary code. In the past, this has been used for, well, speedrunning – doing things like forcing the game to skip straight to the credits sequence. But this new team took the opposite approach, using the arbitrary code execution technique to introduce *more* content into the game instead of skipping past everything.

Their entire presentation is really a joy to watch, and I recommend that all Ocarina of Time fans take an hour to check it out. They built a whole extra story out of classic urban legends surrounding the game, including teaching Link the lost "Overture of Sages" song, letting him actually walk around and explore the Temple of Light in the Sacred Realm and even finally win the rigged race against the Running Man!

The adventure all culminates with Link finally setting foot inside the treasure chamber we older gamers first saw a glimpse of in the magazines of yesteryear, and finally claiming the Triforce after decades of waiting. (But that's not the end! Make sure you stay tuned for the surprise that happens after that!)

I remain absolutely amazed at the dedication of both modders and speedrunners, and this may be my favorite showcase of their skills ever! **– LUCAS**

YouTube.com/GamesDoneQuick



9.0

FAN-MADE REMAKE REVIEW

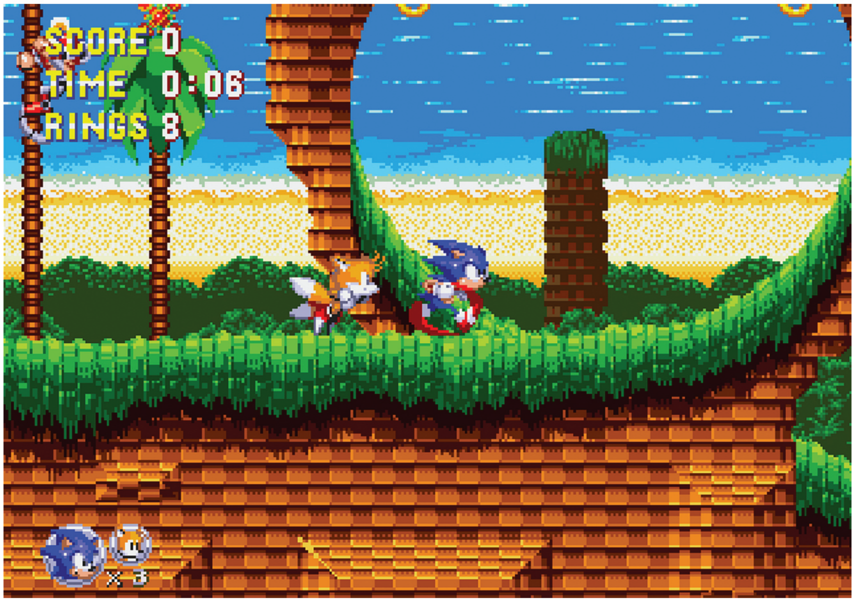
Sonic Triple Trouble 16-Bit

Originally seen on the Game Gear, but now kicked up into high gear!

AMONG THE GAMES that will be going by the wayside with the closure of the Nintendo 3DS eShop is the Virtual Console version of Sonic the Hedgehog: Triple Trouble, a 1994 Game Gear title from Aspect and Sega. Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of Noah N. Copeland and his team, there is a worthy successor that's available now – and it's free, no less!

After four years of development, a new version of the classic handheld title is not only here, but it's also seen a substantial upgrade to 16-bit style in its shift to PC. Sonic Triple Trouble 16-Bit isn't just a graphical facelift, however. Rather than, say, The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening going from the Game Boy to the Switch, this is more in line with remakes such as Castlevania to Super Castlevania IV, Star Fox to Star Fox 64 or Metroid II: Return of Samus to Metroid: Samus Returns.

The game feels remarkably faithful to the Game Gear original, but expands upon the concepts that were introduced there significantly with new stage layouts, Badniks and gimmicks. Knuckles and Nack the Weasel (or Fang the Sniper, if you prefer – literally, as you can actually change his name to suit your preference) have much more prominent roles now, and there are a lot of neat new segments with effects that the Game Gear might not have been able to handle.



This includes the new Special Stages, where you'll race Nack for the Chaos Emeralds. Outside of Sonic CD, I've made it no secret that I generally don't like Sonic Special Stages very much, but these might just be some of the best I've ever played! They're easily on par with the best Sega has ever seen fit to print.

Despite the 16-bit style, there are some more modern amenities as well. Lose in the Special Stage? Similar to Sonic Origins, you can pay to have another go at it at the cost of one of your extra lives. The Drop Dash introduced in Sonic Mania is here, and most significant of all is that, rather than choosing between Sonic and Tails and finding their preferred route through each stage, you'll have both with you, and can switch between them at virtually any time.

There's so much more I could say here, but I'll just end by saying that its biggest flaw is that it's not an official release by Sega, because it is absolutely worthy of the canon. That said, Sonic Mania's creators got their start doing fangames like this, so who knows what the future holds? **– DAVID**

gamejolt.com/games/sonictripletrouble16bit/322794

SUMMERTIME BOOK REPORT

The Read for Speed

Carter's thoughts on Omnigamer's in-depth guide!

THERE'S A YOUNG speedrunner-in-training living in the Thomas home.

I've never put much effort into trying to dash through games as fast as possible, but speedrunning wasn't really a thing yet when I was growing up. For my 10-year-old son Carter, though, the desire to zip through games and reach the end credits as quickly as he can has been built into him throughout his most formative childhood years! Sitting together and watching weeks' worth of runs twice a year during the Games Done Quick events has inspired him, and in order to fan that flame as a father, I got him a copy of Speedrun Science, the comprehensive guide to the pursuit first written by Eric "Omnigamer" Koziel and published by Fangamer three years ago.

Then I told him he had to write a summer book report about it! (Yes, even summertime isn't safe from reading assignments and homework here. But hey, at least it's a fun book to be asked to read and report on!) So, now, I'll turn the floor over to Carter for his assessment of this grand speedrunning tome. **— LUCAS**

THIS IS A great book!

I wanted to be a speedrunner because I liked Bayleef's Super Mario Odyssey speedrun at Awesome Games Done Quick 2019. He did a Darker Side run in just three hours and 21 minutes, and that inspired speedrunning for me. I wanted to do a Super Mario Odyssey speedrun for myself! So I did! My first speedrun was on January 30, 2019, when I was only 7!

Since then I've done more speedruns and worked on learning a lot of skips. When I got this book, the author, Eric Koziel, said that speedrunning takes a lot of practice. And he's right!

He splits the book into two big sections: Speedrunning Foundations and Speedrunning Process. Then Speedrunning Foundations is split again into two parts: Speedrunning Philosophy, which tells you what speedrunning is all about (that's great for newcomers), and then Speedrunning History, which tells all about speedrunning's past.

The Speedrunning Process section was my favorite part, because it tells you how to actually do a speedrun. How to make a plan and practice and everything!

The first step is investigation. You play the game you've picked to run at kind of a slow pace and just look around for things that might be helpful in the run. Are there places you can avoid fighting enemies? Ways you can make your character move faster than normal?

Then is routing, where you plan the path, and everything you can do to make the game faster, like skips. I'm really good at skips!

And then there's execution, where you practice more and more. If you know what to do, that's just part of speedrunning! You have to still be able to actually do it when the clock is ticking!

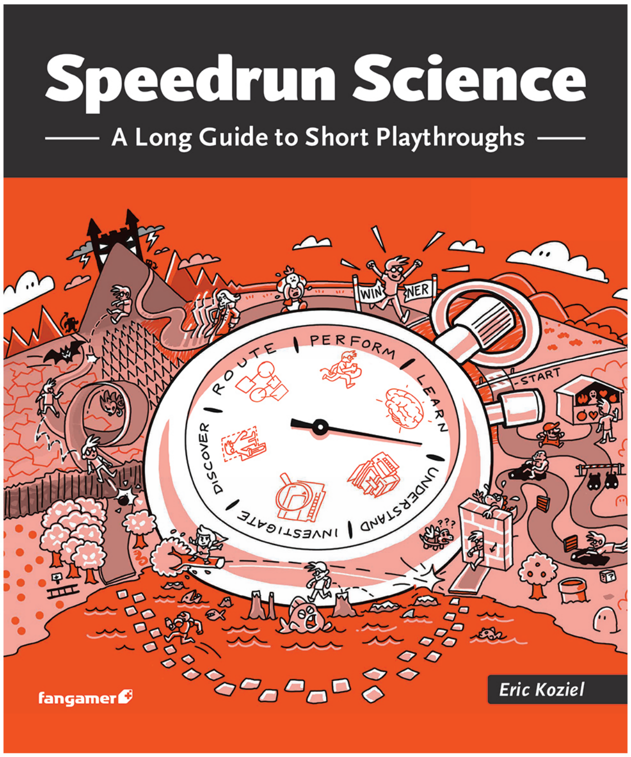
I've been practicing the Moon Cave Skip in Super Mario Odyssey. And I got it on my latest run! You can watch it on YouTube!

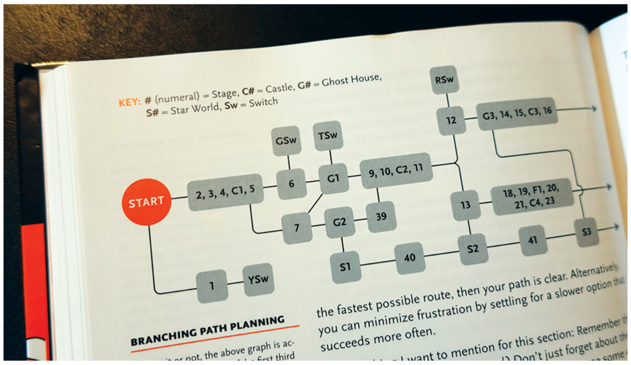
If you practice a lot and get really good, then you could submit your run and maybe you can go perform it at GDQ!

I liked a lot of the parts in this book where he talks about glitches and that kind of stuff. And I liked a lot of the pictures. One time there was a picture of a map, but it was grey, but it was actually a Super Mario World map, so it was cool.

A lot of times he talks about Super Metroid and a lot of Mario games. And Skyblazer, which I think he has the world record for the best speedrun on. Maybe someday I'll get a world record myself! **— CARTER**

www.fangamer.com/products/speedrun-book





BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NEXT ISSUE

Every three years we're faced with a choice between three new Pokémon partners, and that moment of selection is almost upon us again with **Pokémon Scarlet & Violet**! If you're still undecided about whether to set out on your new adventure with Fuecoco, Sprigatito or Quaxly, we'll do our best to help you finalize your thoughts in NF #62. Plus we'll finish our review of **Xenoblade Chronicles 3**, evaluate **Splatoon 3** in full, then begin to look further ahead into the future of what we can expect to see on the Switch when the calendar flips into the New Year: 2023!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #62:

POKÉMON SCARLET & VIOLET

SPLATOON 3

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 3

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD 2

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE COWABUNGA COLLECTION

BEAR & BREAKFAST

SONIC FRONTIERS

MARVEL'S MIDNIGHT SUNS

KIRBY'S DREAM BUFFET

METROID PRIME 4

DIGIMON SURVIVE

NICKELODEON KART RACERS 3: SLIME SPEEDWAY

ANOTHER CRAB'S TREASURE

AND MUCH **MORE!**

NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER 2022

FAMILY SHOPPING TRIP

I TOOK MY own advice!

To open up our last issue, I alerted you all to the opening of Limited Run Games' new retail store in North Carolina. Though I hadn't yet been there myself, I nevertheless recommended that our readers make the trip to 107 Edinburgh South Drive in the city of Cary and visit the new shop in person. (If you have the means to make the trip.) Well, our family has a minivan, so we loaded the kids up and hit the road! It took us eight hours of driving from our native Kentucky, but we arrived safely and checked into a nearby Airbnb to await the store's opening the following Friday. I neglected to mention that last time! Limited Run Retail is only open on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays – hopefully none of you went to check it out on a Monday only to find the doors locked!

Inside, the selection is well curated as expected, with Limited Run's own releases filling most of the shelves. But there is a large pre-owned section filled with great trade-ins, including a sizeable array of Japanese imports all at very reasonable prices! The boys enjoyed browsing around and playing the demo station that was running Shredder's Revenge. I also attempted to help 3-year-old Colson play the crane machine filled with exclusive Shantae plushes, but he just bashed the button immediately and sent the claw straight down into open air. Oops! We ultimately walked away with copies of Mighty Gunvolt Burst and Blaster Master Zero 3 (to stay on theme with this issue). After that, we just had the drive home . . . in the rain . . . through winding mountain roads. (That part wasn't the best.) **– LUCAS**

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